

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

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LEO XIV**

Columban
Reaction

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CREATION**

Care for the Earth
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THE FAR EAST

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

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

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Front Cover

A bee collecting pollen in the Biobío region of southern Chile. The area is famous for its honey-derived products from wild flora. But this is now threatened by the proliferation of large monoculture plantations, such as pine and eucalyptus. Photo: Columban Missionary, Fr Alvaro Martinez.



The story of the Columban missionaries who gave their lives in the Philippines and in Korea is not just about loss; it is about the depth of their faith and the quiet power of love. Their lives and deaths remind us of a truth at the heart of being a Christian: real faith is not guided by fear. It does not make safety the highest priority when love and service call us to something greater.

These Columbans did not seek martyrdom. They did not look for suffering or death. They simply lived their faith by staying with the people they were sent to serve, walking alongside them in their suffering, and standing beside them in their darkest times. War was raging, danger was everywhere, but they chose to stay, not because they had to, but because love kept them there. Their safety mattered, but their mission and the well-being of the people they served mattered more. They had given their hearts to the mission and to the people, and no amount of fear or hardship could make them walk away.

Their deaths were tragic, but they were not just stories of violence and loss. They showed something much greater. They showed a love that chooses to remain, even in the face of danger. This love is not reckless or self-destructive; it does not demand suffering for its own sake. Instead, it shows up every day in small acts of kindness, in the willingness to be present, to care, and to stay, even when everything seems hopeless.

Faith is not about seeking suffering for its own sake, nor is it about carelessly putting oneself in harm's way. The Columban martyrs did not throw themselves into danger needlessly. But when faced with the choice between self-protection and remaining true to their vocation to love and serve, they chose to stay. They chose to stand with the people, to share

in their struggles, and to walk alongside them, even when the cost was high. Faith does not ignore fear, but it does not let fear dictate what is worth doing.

The commemoration of the Columban martyrs in Manila and in Korea invites us to reflect on the depth of their commitment. They did not seek to be heroes; they simply chose to love and serve. Their witness speaks to all of us. It reminds us that the strongest love is often the quietest. It is found not in dramatic sacrifices but in small, daily acts of kindness and faithfulness. It is in choosing to be present for others, to give what we can, and to love without asking for anything in return.

As we remember them, we are invited to embrace each day with open hearts, to live with the same quiet but unwavering devotion, and to trust that the smallest acts of love can reveal the true depth of faith. ●

Fr Andrei Paz

Society Leader, Missionary Society of St Columban

DELVE DEEPER

Water scarcity caused by large monoculture plantations in southern Chile is an issue close to Fr Alvaro Martinez's heart. Thanks to his efforts some native trees and wild flora are flourishing and enhancing biodiversity.

Mirrihue Alto is a rural town located five kilometres from the village of Antuco in the Biobío province of southern Chile. Some of its inhabitants work in the production of honey and honey-derived products. One of the major challenges facing the area is the lack of native trees and wild flora, primarily due to the proliferation of large monoculture plantations, such as pine and eucalyptus.

Trees like eucalyptus can consume between 20 liters of water per day for a three-year-old tree and up to 200 liters a day for a 20-year-old tree, which damages the ecosystem, draining away all the water and rendering these hectares highly vulnerable to forest fires. Furthermore, pine trees cause significant harm to the soil, and this has a knock-on effect on the local wildlife and the ecosystem generally.

Water scarcity is one reason it is difficult to maintain and support native trees and wild flora. In order to maintain floral diversity, deep irrigation wells are often necessary because monoculture directly impacts the lives of bees, pollination, honey production and its by-products, and thus negatively impacts the area's wildlife. That is why, years ago, when I discovered this particular part of my native Chile, I began dreaming of digging a deep well that would enable me to plant native trees which would in turn directly benefit the local ecosystem.

The digging of the well was a long and complex journey in coming to fruition

because the soil is very rocky, the water is deep down in the ground, and this makes well-construction expensive. Over the years of waiting and searching, a satellite survey revealed that the land where I wanted to dig was unsuitable. This discouraging revelation didn't deter me from dreaming and continuing my search.

A few months ago, a small company informed me they could drill a well, so we resumed the hunt for a suitable location. The search for water was carried out using an ancient technique used by the local Mapuche people: they used wooden rods while today pieces of copper wire are used. This method of searching for the "eye of water" or the location of deep water is called *zahorí*. Thanks to this technique, we identified the perfect spot to dig and create a well that would provide water.

I worried about the cost, but with the help of a few friends, I managed to cover the expenses. The man

01. A bee collects nectar from some wild flowers in Chile.

All photos: Fr Alvaro Martinez.

02. Digging for water which was found at a depth of nine metres.

03. The Biobío province of southern Chile where many are involved in the production of honey, but which is threatened by the proliferation of large monoculture plantations, such as pine and eucalyptus.

04. Biodiversity encompasses all living organisms, including plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms, and the ecosystems they form.

overseeing the project revealed that the water was at a depth of 11 metres. His calm demeanour encouraged me to take the risk, though I hadn't said a prayer or sprinkled holy water nor brought a holy medal to the chosen spot.

The initial digging was challenging as the ground was filled with rocks. As we became a little unnerved by the fact that we were only encountering rock, a local man (digging a well is a community effort where all the neighbours help) asked me if I had sought Mother Earth's permission to dig and draw water. This question, "Did you ask Mother Earth's permission to dig and draw water?" lingered in my mind. Early the next day, I returned to the site to pray. I sprinkled holy water from Lourdes, and placed a blessed medal of the Virgin Mary in the soil, and I also sought Mother Earth's permission to continue digging



for water. Soon afterwards the ground began to give way and water gushed from a depth of nine metres. By 13 metres, a steady flow was assured for the trees that will be planted this winter. These native trees will be donated by those supporting this contribution to biodiversity.

This experience has taught me to continue searching even when the 'studies' are unfavourable; it encourages me to trust the dream that drives my search. It reveals the wisdom in "asking permission" which implies recognising our interconnectedness rather than seeing ourselves as owners of Mother Earth or *Ñuke Mapu* in the language of the Mapuche people. It reminds me to trust what others share (the small businessman, the man with the copper rods, the neighbour who accompanied me), and urges me to delve deeper, motivating me to remove the obstacles. Arduous work but one that offers an encounter with life: water! ●

Fr Alvaro Martinez is a Columban Missionary from Chile. He was ordained in 2003. Based in the US region, before that he worked for the Society's General Council in Hong Kong. He was also Vocations Co-ordinator and Regional Director in Chile. His photographic work can be seen here: www.missionlens.cl

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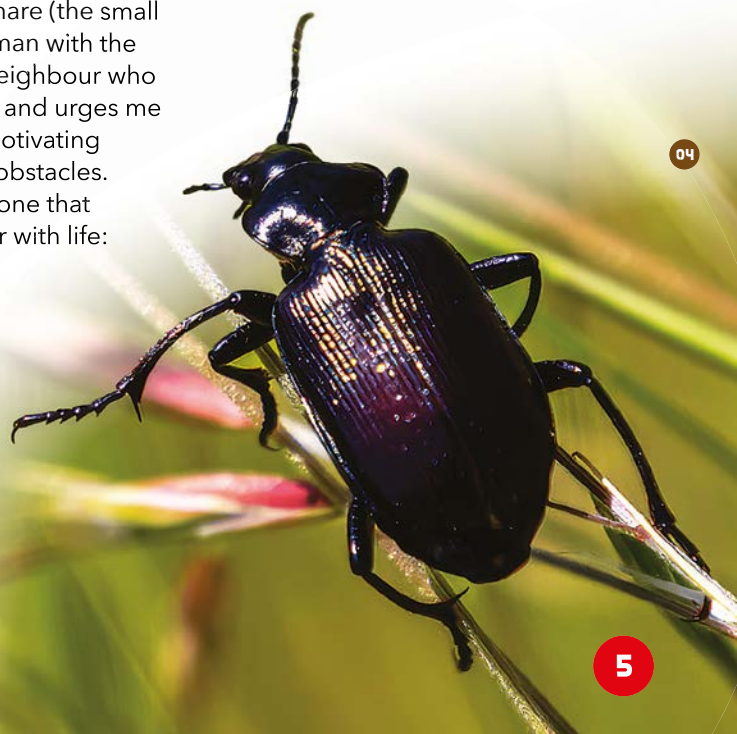


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Fr Vincent Busch writes about his ministry with the Subanen Indigenous People in the Philippines and the challenges they face as they prepare the latest set of Christmas Cards.

CHRISTMAS CARDS MAKE LOVE VISIBLE

I have worked with Subanen artists belonging to the indigenous Subanen people of Western Mindanao in the Philippines for 25 years with the help of the Columban Sisters who have been living and working with them since 1983. Over time I came to appreciate just how deeply the Subanen people revere their mountainous homeland and how closely they interact with the forest, streams and soil of their habitat through their music, dance and rituals.

For centuries their bountiful habitat provided the Subanens with food, water, herbal medicines and materials for their household needs. Using resources from their habitat they cleverly shaped wood, grass, rattan, bamboo and palm leaves into baskets, tools, furniture, mats, hats, musical instruments as well as the walls and roofs of their homes. Impressed by their crafting skill I worked with Subanen artists to form a ministry called Subanen Crafts.

As part of our ministry, we craft Christmas cards whose images link the Nativity story with the life of the Subanen people. We do so by showing Mary and Joseph doing things that Subanen parents do every day for each other and their families such as carrying babies in shoulder slings up steep hills, gathering and cutting firewood, cooking over open fires, fetching water in buckets, washing clothes in basins, sharing

food while sitting on the floor, washing their babies and putting them to sleep.

Such ordinary acts of kindness make love visible especially when people have to do them in dangerous circumstances like those faced by Mary and Joseph - giving birth in the harsh conditions of a stable and then fleeing into a desert to escape a death squad. Subanen families are accustomed to dangerous situations. Like Mary, Subanen mothers give birth in rudimentary conditions. Just last year Subanen crafter Andonie Balido and her unborn baby died in her remote hillside hut.

Like the Holy Family, Subanen families have had to flee from their homes to escape armed groups during times of conflict. More recently Subanens have had to leave their homeland because their habitat has been so degraded by unregulated logging and soil erosion that it can no longer provide them with adequate water, fuel, building materials and arable land.

Global warming and degraded ecosystems are displacing people worldwide. Columban Missionary Fr Teakare Betero, who works with us here in Mindanao, was born in Oceania on the island nation of Kiribati. He tells us that the islands in Kiribati are being engulfed by severe storms and rising sea levels due to climate change. Like the Subanens, families in Kiribati will be forced to seek homes and livelihoods elsewhere.

Every year the Subanen crafters and I gather together at Christmas time to share food, fun, and simple gifts. One fear faced



by Subanen parents is having to leave their families and homeland to find work. Two years ago Janelyn Musdan made the hard decision to leave her children to become a domestic worker for a family in Qatar. She worked 18 hours a day, every day, with no days off. She managed to get home for Christmas but had to return shortly afterwards to work. Like Janelyn many Filipinos work overseas as nurses, caregivers, and domestics in the hope of giving their families a better future.

Juvelyn Vargas has been a Subanen crafter for 16 years. In 2019 she gave birth to two tiny girls long before they were due. Juvelyn then spent weeks in hospital watching her babies struggle for life in an incubator. During her anxious vigil her fellow crafters provided Juvelyn with food and clean clothes. After much waiting Juvelyn and her husband Raffy finally got to hold their two tiny girls, Rhea Faith and Rhea Hope.

During our gathering we remembered Andonie Balives, one of the four original Subanen crafters. In February 2024 Andonie died with her unborn child during a difficult birth. Twenty-four years ago,

Andonie hiked for hours from her remote hillside home to attend our first crafting workshop. It was during that workshop that I noticed her smiling in front of an electric fan. She was surprised by a device that could create the wind. Andonie's children, Barnebe (9) and Melanie (14) are now cared for by their extended family which includes Subanen crafters. Andonie was building their tiny hillside home when she died.

We need to embrace the Subanen people's ability to live within the limits of their habitat if we are to restore the beauty and bounty of our damaged rivers, reefs, mangroves, forests and farmland. With the birth of Jesus, God's love became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus made God's love visible. After his Resurrection Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to form his followers into communities that continue to make God's love visible to the world. The Christmas Star guided the Magi. Come Holy Spirit, guide us in our work and prayer to build communities that care for each other and the wounded Earth, communities that proclaim tidings of great joy for all people. Our caring God is with us. ●

Fr Vincent Busch is a Columban priest from the USA. He has been serving in Mindanao, Philippines since his arrival there in 1975. He initiated a craft project with the Subanens in Zamboanga del Sur in 2001. Learn more about the crafts and cards of the Subanens at www.subanencrafts.com

01. Fr Vincent Busch with a Subanen couple and their child outside their home, which was built from local forest materials.
02. Fr Vincent with Juvelyn Vargas and her husband Raffy and their twin daughters, Rhea Faith and Rhea Hope.
03. Illustration on the latest Subanen Christmas cards showing Mary washing clothes and Joseph cooking.
04. Among the illustrations in the latest batch of Subanen Christmas cards is one showing the shepherds pointing to the Christmas star.

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SUBANEN CHRISTMAS CARDS

Connecting the nativity story with the story of the Subanen people in the Philippines

The Subanens face eviction from their homes by logging and mining companies. With assistance from the Columbans, they use their traditional crafting skills to make jewellery, mandalas, children's books and cards to sell. The income generated provides food, education, housing and healthcare for their families.

Why not support the indigenous Subanen people of the Philippines by buying their traditionally crafted cards?



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FISH, FAITH AND RISING TEMPERATURES

Fr Eamon Adams writes about the warming of the oceans and the ripple effect on fishermen and the marine community in Korea.

After a day of fishing, anglers are often quick to offer reasons for their poor catch. So, when a keen fisherman friend from Mokpo told me that rising sea temperatures are seriously hurting fish stocks and making fishing harder, I was a bit dubious. Climate change is warming the seas, but could it really be having such a drastic impact on fish stocks? To find out, I looked into recent reports on fishing in South Korea. What I found not only confirmed my friend's concerns but also painted a worrying picture for the future of fishing and the communities that rely on it.

Around the world, oceans are getting warmer, and climate change is the main cause. When we burn fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal, we release greenhouse gases into the air. These gases trap heat from the sun, causing the Earth's temperature to rise. What many people do not realise is that about 90% of this trapped heat does not stay in the air but ends up in the oceans. Which, in turn, slowly but surely raises ocean temperatures. For the Korean Peninsula, the rise in sea temperatures is even higher than the global average because of its geographic location.

Like many climate change issues, rising sea temperatures is often neglected or goes unnoticed. Since the ocean is still largely a mystery to most of us, it is easy to overlook just how serious and wide-reaching the effects can be, for both our planet and our daily lives. For local communities like many living in Mokpo, warming oceans mean lost jobs, smaller and less varied diets, and more dangerous working conditions for fishermen. And things are set to get even worse.

One clear example of these ripple effects is the growing number of fishing accidents. Rising sea temperatures are pushing fish species like mackerel and hairtail, both important parts of Korea's diet and usually caught near the coast, into deeper, cooler waters because their old habitats have become too warm. This forces fishermen to go farther out, into deeper and more dangerous waters, often for longer periods. Sometimes they even risk ignoring storm warnings just to catch a few more fish. Sadly, in 2024, 118 fishermen from Korean fleets lost their lives at sea, a tragic number that is rising annually. It might sound strange,





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but climate change is linked to the rising number of fishing accidents off the Korean coast.

When we realise how everything is interconnected we then begin to grasp how the warming of the oceans has a negative knock-on for so many other areas. It is not about being able to dip our feet into the sea without them turning blue or to enjoy a swim without gasping at the cold. The reality is much more serious, and the consequences far-reaching. For island inhabitants, fishermen, and others who make their living from the sea like chandlers, seafood restaurateurs, and fishmongers, warming seas bring hardship and can even lead to the breakup of entire communities.

It would not be fair to focus only on how rising sea temperatures affect people living along the coast. In fact, the marine community suffers most from this warming. From tiny creatures like zooplankton to seaweed, fish, and large mammals like whales, all are directly impacted by the uncertainty caused by warmer oceans. For example, the distribution of anchovy, a key fish in Korea, has shifted, and their spawning patterns are changing. Seaweed growth has also been affected because it is very sensitive to water temperature. Just like on land, perhaps even more so, the marine community is interconnected; what affects one species has a knock-on effect on others. It is a case of all, both marine and human life, being in the same boat.

As people of faith, what do these changes in ocean temperature mean for us? Rising sea temperatures are more than just an environmental issue. For Christians, it touches something sacred. In the Bible, fish are symbols of nourishment and God's care. When Jesus fed 5,000 people with

just five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21), it was a powerful sign of God's love. After his resurrection, Jesus helped his disciples haul in an incredible catch of fish (John 21:1-14). This showed his ongoing presence and generosity.

Today, warmer temperatures are disrupting the natural balance of ocean life. This affects both our environment and our spiritual tradition. The Bible calls believers to care for creation (Genesis 1:28). The decline of fish is a reminder of that responsibility. It is a challenge. Christians are called to care for the planet and to support coastal communities who depend on the sea for their daily nourishment and sense of purpose.

Caring for creation is an act of faith. By protecting the oceans, we honour God's gifts and live out our role as caretakers of the Earth. We also protect something beautiful, not just a source of food, but of memories, peace, and wonder. As the legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau once said, "The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever." ●

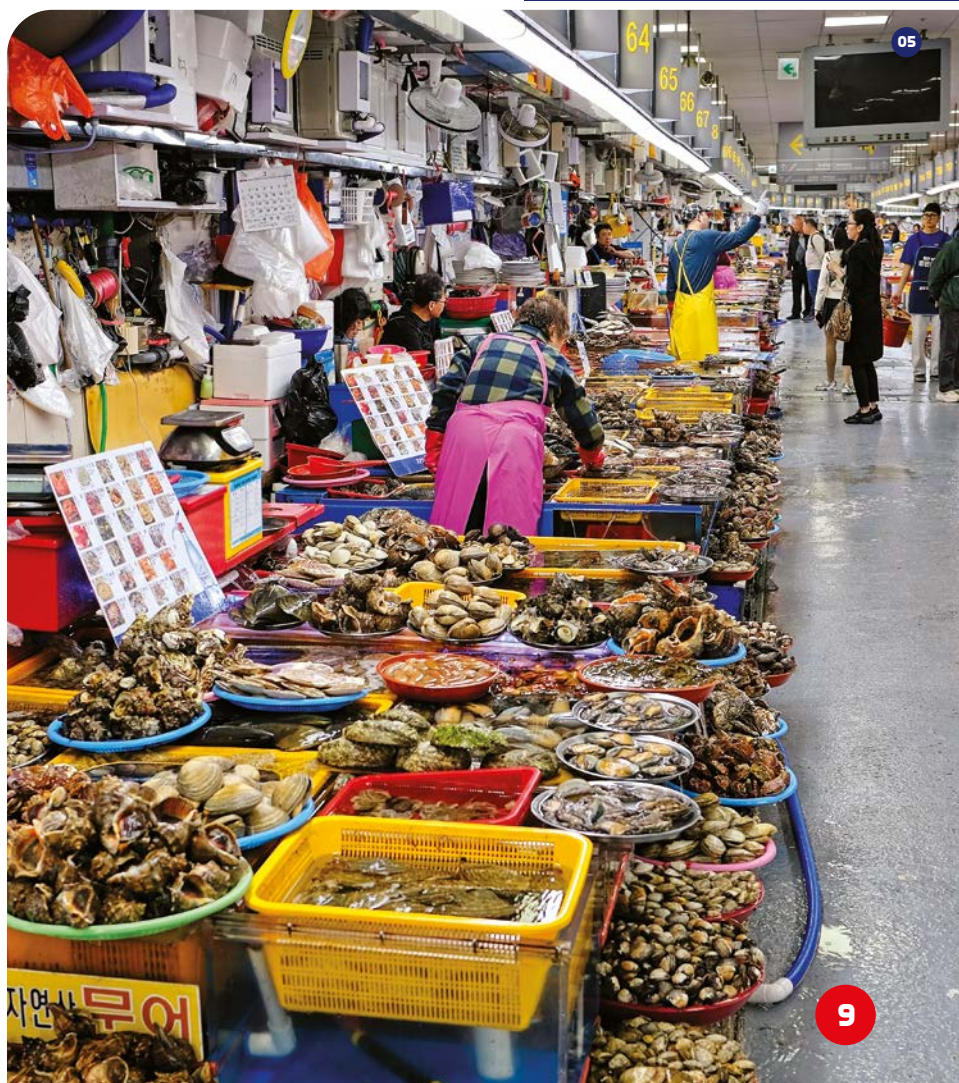
Fr Eamon Adams is from Northern Ireland. Ordained in 1993, he is working in Korea and is an expert on interreligious dialogue, especially with Buddhists.

01. Young Jae Oh, a friend of Fr Eamon Adams, who hails from Manjae island off the Korean coast and is a keen fisherman.
02. A fishing boat returning to port at North Harbour, Mokpo.
03. Harbour and fishing boats in Manjae island which has an aging population of about 30 people.
04. Fr Eamon at the harbour in Mokpo.
05. The fish market in Busan.

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CHOOSING THE PATH TO LIFE

Becoming missionary disciples, writes Columban Sr Young Mi Cho, is not something achieved once when we chose a particular path. It demands continuous conversion and a willingness to grow in love.

When I felt drawn to religious life – particularly to become a missionary, in the mid-1990s, my perception of the world was still very simple. I think Robert Frost's famous poem captures it very well: "*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...*" I was young and idealistic; not knowing much of the complexity of life, I chose one path believing that it would lead me through the yellow wood of life and to an encounter with God. I didn't realise that life wasn't so simple and many other roads diverged from the path I had chosen.

I worked for ten years as a missionary with children with disabilities in the Philippines and then struggled to build and maintain a small Christian community in a poor area of Peru. My perceptions and ideas about life and my faith underwent a radical change during this time. Through my experience of living and sharing life with the poor, I began to see my life and my faith through a different lens.

My perceptions were again challenged when I assumed the role of formator of our young Sisters in the novitiate. My own formation in Religious Life had taken place in my own culture in Korea

but with an Irish formator. Twenty-five years later, the context of formation had changed. It was a different world and reality in the Philippines. Our International Novitiate was formed in Manila amid the unpredictable reality of the Covid pandemic. The location offered a rich context for formation at a time when many congregations had few vocations and few younger members with whom they could experience religious companionship.

I still remember my feeling of amazement when I attended an inter-congregational formation programme with our novices. The statement of the Asian Bishops' Conferences flashed before my eyes: "Asia, blessed with diverse cultures, religions, languages and ethnicities, is the world's largest continent in terms of both geographical area and population". It was an eye-opening experience to see participants from all over Asia and from different congregations get together, sharing their own richness, challenging the biases of one another and building companionship together. It is rare to have such an intercultural formative experience. The vision and the contribution of the participating congregations was large enough for the young men and women in formation to experience the intercultural-community life and ecclesial societal life that is a requisite for Religious Life today.

'Diversity' is the word that describes our own community. When seven of us from the Philippines, Korea, Peru and Myanmar settled in the Philippines, we often got lost

01. An inter-congregational formation programme in the Philippines highlights how Asia is blessed with diverse cultures, religions, languages and ethnicities. All photos: Sr Young Mi Cho.

02. "I was young and idealistic; not knowing much of the complexity of life, I chose one path believing that it would lead me to an encounter with God."

03. "The choices that we make are what make us who we are and shape our contributions to life in our small and large worlds."



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or in trouble. It was not because of the big ideas around Religious Life or our charism. It was in the making of simple daily life choices that we often experienced unexpected feelings, thoughts and different opinions that distanced us from each other. For example, when we saw the bright and beautiful *longi* fabric from Myanmar, one person wanted to use it to decorate the chapel, while another was disturbed by the idea of placing something secular - it is worn as a woman's skirt - on the altar. Still another argued that times have changed, and we need to move beyond dualistic thinking about what is sacred and what is secular. I cannot deny the many times I did not have answers for these valid points. But the true temptation here was to bypass the conversation, justifying the notion that this was only a very minor thing in our daily lives, and not have the unpleasant conversation that would reveal our own biases. Little things were big things!

Later, I realised the importance of unpacking the small and uncomfortable things. Here in our honest sharing, we opened up our wounds and vulnerability to one another, and experienced pain and forgiveness in the community. Formation, after all, is about conversion



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and transformation of our heart. How we see our differences and the way of resolving conflicts leads us to the question of our values as Columbans and what binds us together as Columbans.

The choices that we make are what make us who we are and shape our contributions to life in our small and large worlds. Personally, my time working in Formation was also a formative period for myself, enlarging my perception and vision and deepening my faith. Becoming missionary disciples of the Lord is not something achieved once and for all as I had believed before, when I chose my particular path. It demands continuous conversion, growing in love "to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Formation is the process of becoming more and more a disciple of Christ. ●

Sr Young Mi Cho served on mission in the Philippines and Peru and later assumed the role of Novice Directress. She currently serves as a member of the Congregational Leadership Team.

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— St Columban

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ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE POPE

Columbans have traditionally been in step with popes and have at times even arrived in places before them, writes Fr John Boles.

“John, how would you fancy coming with us on a trip to Rome and Assisi?” This was the lovely invitation I received from my good friends and long-time Columban supporters Dave and Sue back in January 2025. Of course I jumped at the chance. “When would be best for you?”, they asked. We compared diaries and decided the most convenient date for starting the journey would be 8th May.

Thursday 8th May may sound familiar? It was the day Cardinal Robert Prevost was chosen by the Conclave as the new pope, taking the title Pope Leo XIV. The cardinals had made their choice, but it appeared we had stolen a march on them. We were already on our way to Rome!

I thought about this as we joined the crowds in St Peter's Square to await the first Sunday Blessing by the new pope. I began to realise how we Columbans have had a habit of anticipating papal events. Take, for example, Leo's predecessor, our beloved Pope Francis. In June 2015 he inspired the world with his encyclical **Laudato Si'**, showing how combined care of the natural and social environment – “our common home” – was a spiritual and human imperative. Yet, in many respects, Columban Fr Seán McDonagh had already pointed out much of this over 20 years before in his seminal work, **The Greening of the Church** (1990).

Francis tirelessly emphasised the dignity and equality of every person in

society, irrespective of gender, class or ethnic background. He fostered greater participation in the Church by all men and women, not just ordained male priests, culminating in the 2023-25 Synodal process. However, in a way, Columbans had been doing the same for years. I remember on arriving in my mission country, Peru, in 1994 I was delighted to find how the Columbans were promoting lay involvement in liturgy, pastoral work and decision-making throughout our missions. Indeed, a common refrain I heard during my time in Peru was along the lines of, “You Columbans, you were Francis before Francis!”

Meanwhile, back on our travels, I continued to find myself one step ahead of Pope Leo! Not only was the new pope a friend and collaborator of Francis, but he was also a missionary at the same time and in the same country as myself – Peru.

On Saturday 10th May we decided to join the multitudes praying at the tomb of Pope Pope Francis in Rome's Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. As we were leaving, we noticed the police closing off the approach road to traffic. A small cavalcade arrived, escorting none other than Pope Leo, who was coming to pay his respects at Francis's tomb. We had beaten him to it by 40 minutes!

Soon after, we left for the wonderful hilltop medieval town of Assisi, famous as the home and resting place of St Francis, inspiration of the late pope who had taken the Saint's name as his own. Along with





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Columban Missionary Fr John Boles is from Stockport. Ordained in 1996, he served on mission in Peru. He is currently Regional Director in Britain.

01. Fr John Boles in the early morning sunshine of 11th May 2025 in St Peter's Square ahead of Pope Leo's first Sunday Blessing.
02. Fr John at the tomb of Pope Francis on 10th May 2025, 40 mins before the arrival of Pope Leo.
03. Fr John and Dave in Assisi. The Basilica of St Francis can be seen in the bottom left just above Fr John's right hand.
04. Soon to be Saint Carlo Acutis.
05. Pope Leo XIV. Image: Shutterstock

the other pilgrims we visited the tomb of St Francis and the shrine of his companion in faith and vocation, St Clare. We then proceeded to a third very recent shrine: the resting place of Blessed Carlo Acutis (1991-2006), located in yet another church dedicated to Mary as Santa Maria Maggiore.

The story of Carlo Acutis - variously called a "saint for our times" or "the teenage saint" - is a fascinating one. He was born in London to Italian parents, who soon moved the family back to Italy, where the young Carlo grew up and was consumed by two passions - Jesus and the Internet. He became well known both as a "computer geek" and a catechist. He combined them

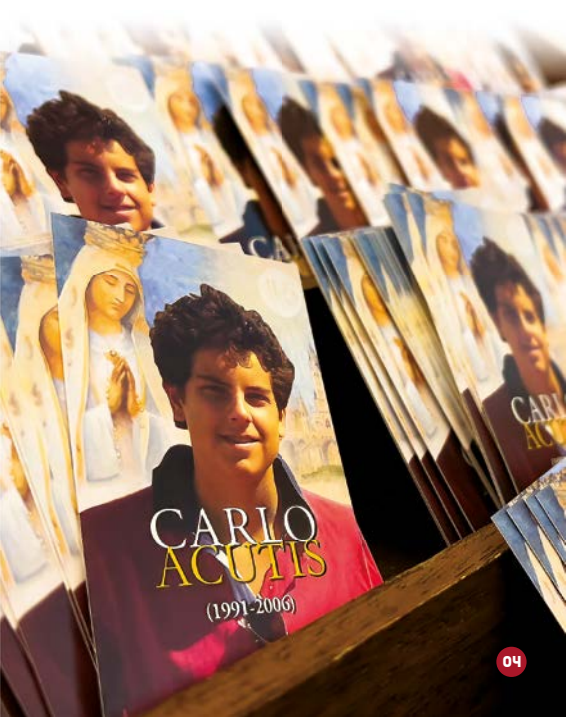
by launching a Catholic website in 2004. The initiative culminated in an exhibition unveiled on 4th October 2006, the feast of St Francis of Assisi - just days before Carlo himself tragically died from leukaemia. Beatified in 2020, his canonisation was planned for 27th April 2025 but had to be postponed due to the death of Pope Francis.

Later, we met one of the volunteers who was accompanying pilgrims to Assisi. He assured us they were eagerly awaiting the announcement of a fresh date for the canonisation and the arrival of the new Pope at the shrine. It was later announced that the canonization will take place on the 7th September 2025. Once again, it seemed we had anticipated a pontiff's future move. But that's the Columbans all over. Always in step with the papacy... and sometimes even a step ahead. ●

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04



05

POPE LEO XIV

Two Columbans who have a long association with Peru give their reaction to the election of Pope Leo XIV who served there as a missionary and a bishop.

Fr Peter Hughes

Pope Leo is "a person that is totally committed to the Gospel". He is "calm, compassionate and has a great feeling for people, particularly the poor", according to Columban Missionary Fr Peter Hughes. Speaking to BBC Radio 4 from Peru following the election of the new pontiff, Fr Peter described the 69-year-old Chicagoan as "a man who is serious about listening to the cry and the pain of the earth, the destruction that's going on, and also the cry of the poor. These are not two distinct sorts of crises."

Fr Peter revealed that he was "a good friend" of Bob Prevost but added, that "doesn't mean we would have been meeting personally very often". The friendship was built through their work for Peru's poor and efforts to save the Amazon and protect indigenous people.

He believes Pope Leo will follow "in the ecclesiology, reform and synodality of Pope Francis. There will be differences; he will probably be more careful with liturgy. He's a diplomat in lots of ways. He's calm. Very intelligent. His style will be different. He won't be able to do the 'show thing' of Francis."

He highlighted how the people of the Diocese of Chiclayo in Peru were "absolutely delighted" when their former bishop was elected pope. "He would be totally onside with everything that a person like me would be doing and stand for in REPAM (a Catholic Church network that promotes the rights and dignity of people

living in the Amazon) in human rights and the environment. I have no doubt about it at all," Fr Peter said.

Fr Ed O'Connell


In Peru, the Augustinians have traditionally overseen the Prelature of Chulucanas. The then Fr Robert Prevost arrived in Peru in 1985, presumably to serve in Chulucanas, but instead, spent ten years in Trujillo. There, he worked as a parish priest and taught in the regional seminary. In 1984, Prevost moved to Chiclayo as Administrator of the Diocese.

In his final two years in Peru, Prevost also administered the troubled Diocese of Callao, again acting as a trusted problem-solver. By then, he had also become Vice President of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference. The people of Chiclayo are delighted that he is now Pope Leo XIV, he was their bishop. Pope Francis appointed him to Chiclayo to bring stability after the retirement of the previous bishop, who was from Opus Dei. As Leo himself said recently, it was the people who formed him as a bishop, through their affection, affirmation, and kindness.

Leo represents continuity with Francis but also offers the possibility of greater unity. Many bishops and cardinals did not fully grasp Francis' mindset, not having shared his pastoral experiences. Sadly, many still struggle to understand what true evangelisation looks like. But Leo does understand, his years in South America gave him that insight. ●

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In silence and stillness...

A still cold morning, walking at a gentle pace around Glendalough, can spark many memories and provoke questions in our minds and hearts. This can be an invitation to our souls to experience healing, renewal, and inspiration through the beauty, silence, solitude, and serenity of the mystics of this holy place.

When we are busy, pressured, and stressed in daily life, taking time to create space and walk along the path in silence and stillness can call each of us into our innermost being, where we search for what life's journey is all about. Questions that may arise include: "Who am I?" "Where do I come from and where am I going?" "How am I at present?" "What am I looking for in life?" "How do my values and attitudes impact my life, my neighbours, colleagues at work, and our world?"

In particular these questions arise during this uncertain, fragile, and messy time where we struggle and suffer alongside so many people affected by wars and the global climate crisis. Feelings of worry, anxiety, uncertainty, confusion, and fear can overwhelm us, leading to a sense of loss and a longing to flee to St Kevin's cave. At a distance it seems a lonely, dark, cold, and lifeless place.

Sometimes we wonder, "Where is God in this?" Even, "Who is God?" "Is God the one who is love and compassion?" At the same time, these reflections call us to have courage and deep faith, and to stay with our questions and feelings, allowing ourselves to ponder and surrender in silence and stillness within our own inner cave.

After a period of silence, we may hear a blackbird singing, followed by other birds, and listen to the sound of running water, then feelings of a gentle breeze and warm sunshine on our faces. Our eyes may catch sight of green leaves and flowers. Our inner souls find peace, joy, and new space, giving us the freedom to embrace our own pain and suffering, as well as that of our sisters and brothers, in a solidarity that celebrates the beauty, sacred and invaluable nature of our human life.

Our hearts are open to see the sun shining, the water sparkling on the lake, and the birds singing and dancing. Small flowers are praising the Lord everywhere. We may have thought we were in a tomb, only to realise that we are in a womb, nurtured, comforted, and renewed by the Holy Spirit in silence and solitude. We can recognise a strong connection to the love and compassion of all the people who lived in this sacred place in Glendalough, leaving behind their legacy and heritage of Ancient Love.

We are blessed to have this sacred place to visit as often as we need to reconnect with our inner souls, where we can hear the whisperings of the One who loves us infinitely. We are encouraged to be brave in entering into silence and stillness within this sacred and holy space. ●

Sr Susanna Choi

'PEACE WITH CREATION'

Ellen Teague of the Columban Justice and Peace Ecology Team (JPE) in Britain looks at what the Columbans there have been doing for the Season of Creation.



02



03

One of the world's most popular new video games is attracting people to gardening... virtual gardening! 'Grow a Garden' involves players slowly developing a little patch of virtual land. Only launched in March, by June more than 16 million people - many of them children - were playing it, and for hours a day. If people discover they love virtual gardening, might they be encouraged to take up the real thing? Biodiversity relies on the nurturing of real land and real water resources in today's world.

The Season of Creation offers the opportunity for doing just that. It runs from 1st September (World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation) to 4th October (Feast of St Francis of Assisi). Catholics are encouraged to organise prayer and practical initiatives to combat the environmental crisis. It is a time for our Churches to value and thank God for the gifts of Creation. Pope Leo XIV's message for World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 1st September is **Seeds of Peace and Hope**. In this Jubilee Year, Pope Leo celebrated the first **Mass for the Care of Creation** on 9th July, with prayers that we will "lovingly care" for creation and "learn to live in harmony with all creatures".

The theme of Season of Creation this year is: **Peace with Creation**. It highlights that natural ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands, are destroyed or degraded by conflict - a mounting problem in our world today. Wars divert political attention and financial resources away from climate action and environmental protection. In many countries, clean energy projects and conservation efforts are delayed or defunded as governments shift priorities toward military spending and crisis

management.

Making peace with nature and protecting biodiversity have been integral to Columban Mission for five decades, inspired by the work of Columban eco-theologian Fr Seán McDonagh and the 2015 papal encyclical **Laudato Si'**, on which Fr Seán was a consultant. Internationally, Columbans support initiatives such as a major tree-growing project in the Philippines and environmental stewardship in Pakistan.

A campaign spearheaded by Caritas Internationalis calls for debt relief and adequate climate finance for low-income countries. Too often, indebted countries have been forced to intensify extraction and export of their natural resources - including fossil fuels - to service debts. Columbans support the campaigning work of people such as Bishop Gerardo Alimane Alminaza of San Carlos in the Philippines who has challenged banks based in the UK over financing liquefied natural gas terminals and fossil gas power plants in the beautiful Verde Island Passage, a sea strait that separates the islands of Luzon and Mindoro.

In Britain, Columbans are 'rewilding' land around our Solihull headquarters to restore healthy ecosystems by creating biodiverse spaces which allow a variety of life to thrive. More than 5,000 trees - River Birch, Black Alder, Willow, Swamp Cypress, Sweet Gum and Oak, plus fruit trees like Apple, Plum, Pear and Cherry have been planted as well as a wildflower garden. There are new bee hives producing 'St Columban's Honey'. New lavender beds have been planted to attract bees which pollinate 70% of the crops that feed 90% of the world! Over the last few years, school groups have come to Solihull for workshops exploring biodiversity and

rewilding. At least 800 children and staff have visited this year alone.

On 9th July 2025, Columbans joined 5,000 people at the UK's Westminster Parliament for a mass lobby, urging MPs to act on the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and global justice. The lobby was organised by The Climate Coalition, which represents more than 120 leading UK organisations, secular and faith-based. It includes Columban Missionaries and members of the Columban Justice and Peace Ecology Team (JPE) in Britain: James Trewby, Fr Kevin McDonagh and Ellen Teague.

Five schools in Birmingham Archdiocese and one in Liverpool Archdiocese sent delegates to the lobby through a collaborative programme between the Columban JPE Team and the London FCJ Centre for Spirituality and Ecojustice. Columban JPE co-ordinator James Trewby arranged for the students to meet several MPs and Bishop John Arnold of Salford, Lead Bishop on the Environment for the Bishops of England and Wales.

The Season of Creation website has a wide variety of resources for individuals, groups and parishes. Materials available

include a Celebration Guide that contains numerous ideas for activities such as prayer services, pilgrimages and walks, or organising educational and sustainability activities.

Despite the focus of many Christian services on a Eucharistic meal and celebrating the gifts of creation, too often Christians have alienated themselves from the natural world. Perhaps during the Season of Creation we could revive saying Grace before family and community meals to recover our appreciation of the food provided by the natural world.

On 4th September, a workshop takes place which Columbans helped organise for Religious on the theme: *Celebrating 19 Years of Laudato Si'*: Our vocation for prophetic action and investment for our common home. The Columbans have also organised with Salford's Laudato Si' Centre a Jubilee Year Season of Creation Pilgrimage on 25th September with the theme, *Hope for Our Common Home*. Participants will walk from the Laudato Si' Centre at Wardley Hall to Salford Cathedral. It is an opportunity to experience and appreciate the real world of God's wonderful and diverse creation. ●

01. The Columban JPE Team joined 5,000 people at the UK's Westminster Parliament to lobby MPs to act on the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and global justice.
02. Students from a local primary school in Solihull meet Sheila Vanhouse, a local beekeeper who keeps six of her hives in the grounds of our Columban Solihull House, supporting our rewilding efforts.
03. Flourish Day - training for teachers from schools making use of the Columban grounds in Solihull for care for creation workshops with students.

The Season of Creation Celebration Guide can be downloaded at www.seasonofcreation.org

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SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION 2026

The Columbans are looking for students in Britain and Ireland (aged 13-18 inclusive) to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme:

"BECOMING A REFUGEE IS NEVER A CHOICE, BUT HOW WE RESPOND IS."

(UN Secretary-General António Guterres)

Catholic Social Teaching calls us to 'welcome the stranger'. We invite young people to explore perceptions of people seeking sanctuary, considering practical examples of welcome and solidarity.

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DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: 14TH FEBRUARY 2026
WINNERS ANNOUNCED: 9TH MARCH 2026

More details: www.columbancompetition.com



REKINDLING 'CARE FOR THE EARTH'

Fr Oliver McCrossan reports on a training workshop on regenerative agriculture, specifically soil regeneration, which he and his supporters arranged for local farmers in Misamis Oriental.



Over two days last February a training workshop on regenerative agriculture and soil regeneration was held at the Living Soils Farm in Claveria, Misamis Oriental.

The training in Sitio Kakawan, Patrocenio was attended by ten key leaders who are involved in farming and faith-based organisations. They promote various initiatives in Mindanao to protect and care for the environment through agro-ecological, climate-resilient farming practices.

The objective of the workshop was to rekindle interest and inspire these leaders who have been working, practicing and promoting natural and organic agriculture in rural areas. It provided them with an opportunity to learn about the latest developments in agriculture in the Philippines, specifically organic agro-ecological and soil regeneration practices, and the role of soil microorganisms in sustaining agriculture.

At the venue, participants were able to see the living proof of what they were learning about: healthy plants grown with the use of naturally produced indigenous microorganisms. Corn, peanuts, tomato, string beans, sweet potato, and many more varieties are grown at Living Soils Farm, using tailored-made, science-based bio-solutions. Farmers get to see how soil can be transformed for better yields and healthy plants. The method was developed and enhanced by the Living Soils Farm under Gerry Burdas, who recently studied at the Soil Food Web System in California, USA.

The training helps participants to upgrade their tools and at the same time it helps them understand the process of regenerating, revitalising, or healing the soil. Bobby M. Pagusara, former Coordinator of MASIPAG-Mindanao and Agroecology Consultant of the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund (Fastenaktion) projects in the Philippines spoke about soil as God's creation. The soil is perfect. It has a complete and balanced ecosystem with beneficial and non-beneficial microbes such as bacteria, fungi, and nematodes, that eat harmful bacteria, fungi, and nematodes thereby neutralising or preventing bad microbes from causing sickness and diseases in plants.

As a result of this process, the wastes or excretions, which include minerals and nutrients eaten by bacteria and fungi become 'yummy' food. These food nutrients nourish the plants making them grow very well. Billions of beneficial bacteria-protozoa, fungus-mycelium, and nematodes are found in soils that are not sprayed with synthetic agrochemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Different kinds of microbes and minerals should together produce

the desired result, making minerals and nutrients available for plants and preventing bad microbes from harming or infecting the plants. This can happen only when they are together as a community. But agrochemicals disrupt this mutual and symbiotic process because all microbes good and bad are destroyed or killed by synthetic chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

So natural organic farming is the right way to manage agriculture. Good soil is indicated by many clusters of microbial communities bonded together, as was observed by participants during training through a microscope. When organisms are in communion, good things happen. This is also the challenge to human organisms: we need to unite as universal clusters of communities under a common purpose of restoring the soil and caring for the environment. We strive to do this in the best way possible following the most perfect model of communion: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

By the end of the workshop, participants were inspired and motivated to continue organic farming and/or regenerative



agro-ecological methods to help mitigate climate change, and to care for the environment, as well as the health and life of people and the world. Greg Tacbas, who is a farm leader and a local church lay minister, commented at the end of the workshop: "The training is very reaffirming. It reconfirms and provides sufficient proof of my previously gained knowledge in the field of sustainable, organic, diversified and integrated agriculture. I am inspired to pursue agro-ecology." He thanked the friends and supporters of Fr Oliver McCrossan for sponsoring the training, as well as Gerry Burdas and Bobby Pagusara who coordinated and shared their knowledge. ●

Fr Oliver McCrossan is from Co Donegal. Ordained in 1975, he was missioned to the Philippines where he set up a number of projects to help those in poverty and to promote sustainable farming. He now lives in Dalgan. This year he celebrates the golden jubilee of his ordination.

01. Participants who took part in training in regenerative soil methods, a workshop supported by friends of Fr Oliver McCrossan.
02. Fr Oliver (standing on the right) visited the Living Soil Farm with Bobby Pagusara (centre). The farm owner, Gerry Burdas (left), explains how the natural compost and bio-solution work on tomatoes.
03. Preparing the natural compost during the workshop.
04. Regenerative agro-ecological methods help mitigate climate change and promote care for the environment as well as for the health and life of people.

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Receive mission updates, stories and reflections direct to your email from Columban missionaries in Britain and around the world.

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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BRITAIN



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REST ⁱⁿ PEACE



Fr Peter Hughes



Fr Noel O'Neill

Fr Peter Hughes was born on 9th October 1951 at Cleggan in the parish of Clifden in the Archdiocese of Tuam. He came to Dalgan in September 1970 and was ordained priest on 10th April 1977. Appointed to Chile, he served for many years in the Parish of El Olivo in the Archdiocese of Santiago. He shared the struggles of many families and made deep and lasting friendships during the years of the dictatorship through Basic Ecclesial Communities. In 1984, when the Parish of San Marcos in Santiago was divided, Peter became Pastor of the newly-created parish of San Columbano, the first in Latin America to be called after our Patron, St Columban. From 1987 to 1991 Peter served his first term as Director of the Region of Chile. He inaugurated the Columban mission to the Indigenous Mapuche people in the south of Chile. He worked for the Society's General Council from 1992-1994. Returning to Chile in 1995, he was appointed Vice Director. In June 1998 he was again appointed Director of Chile and served two three-year terms. In 2004 he was appointed to Britain and was Justice and Peace Co-ordinator for the Region for 11 years. He was Regional Vice Director from 2010-2015 when he was appointed Regional Director and served six years in that post. His eye trouble began during his final year as Director and deteriorated at an alarming rate. He moved to the Dalgan Nursing Home in August 2022 where he faced a number of debilitating infections until his death on 30th March 2025. Peter will be remembered as a compassionate missionary who reached out to the marginalised and vulnerable.

Fr Noel O'Neill was born in Limerick on 19th December 1932. He came to Dalgan in 1950 and was ordained priest on 21st December 1956. Appointed to Korea, after language studies he spent time in Chollanamdo, and Mokpo before returning for a longer period to Bouk Dong Church in Kwangju. He was appointed Vice-Superior and later District Superior of Kwangju in 1974. During his years in parish work he became acquainted with the Mou Dong Institution which housed 500 marginalised people who were mentally ill, intellectually disabled, orphans, homeless and the elderly. In 1981, the International Year of the Disabled, Noel sought permission to begin a new ministry to people with special needs. He opened the first Emmaus Centre in a residential part of the city. He set up a Rainbow Community to bring about a change of attitude towards those with intellectual disabilities within their families, the community at large, and government departments. Centres and services for children and adults with intellectual disabilities followed as well as workshops, a factory programme, a programme for the homebound, a day-care centre and 16 Emmaus Communities. The way of life of those with intellectual disabilities from womb to tomb was often seen by wider society in Korea as a disappointment to their families and a burden on the taxpayer. Noel campaigned for better services and greater recognition of the 'differently-abled' and those marginalised because of their disabilities. He returned to the Dalgan Nursing Home in April 2024 and died peacefully there on Sunday 1st June 2025, the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord.

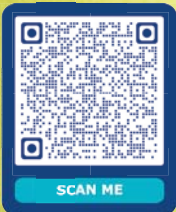
May they rest in peace.

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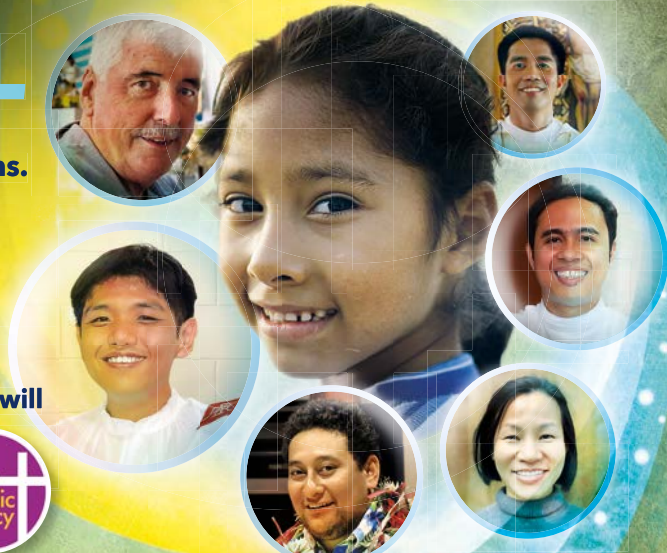
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NATIONAL FREE WILLS NETWORK



A FOOLISH BUILDER

Great crowds came to hear the stories Jesus told. They were eager to understand the way they should live their lives in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus told them that it was not easy for people to give themselves completely to God. Greed, selfishness, ambition, worldly desires – even families – all got in the way at one time or another. It is important that we come prepared to give up all these things. Entering God's kingdom is costly, but the rewards are great.

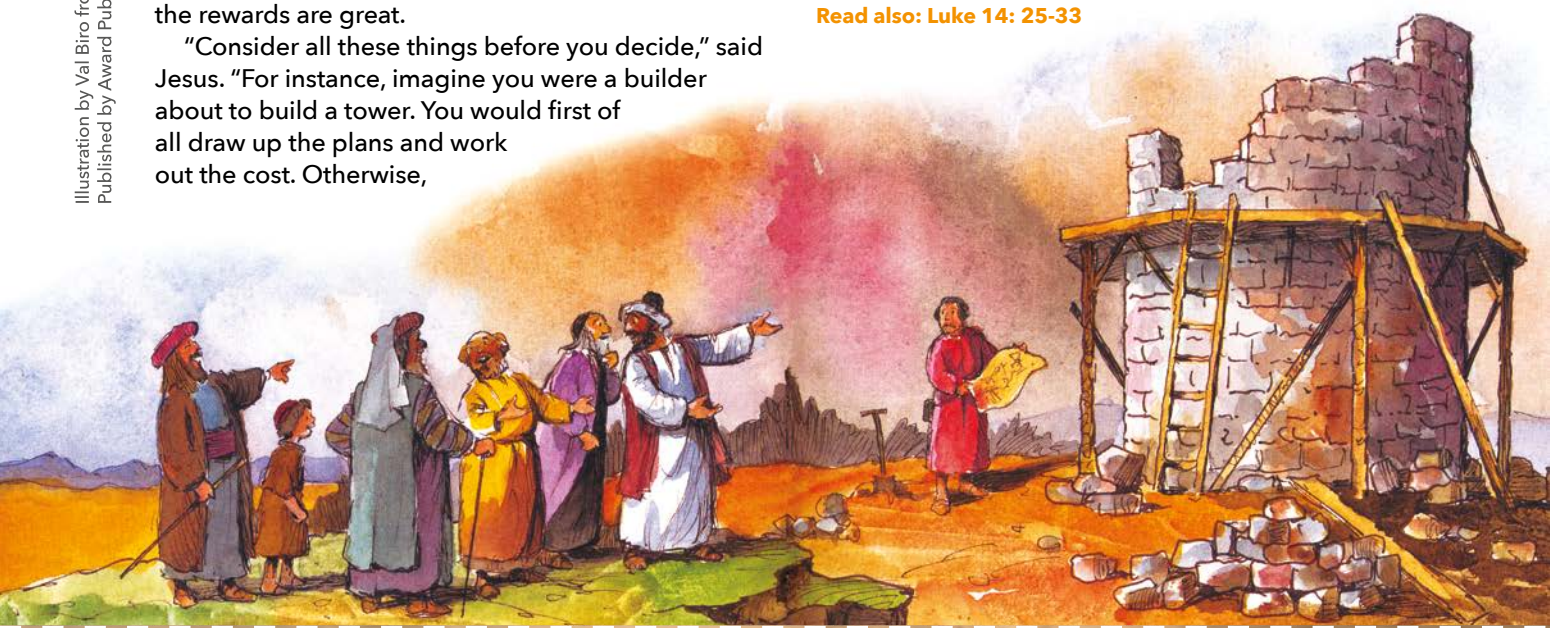
"Consider all these things before you decide," said Jesus. "For instance, imagine you were a builder about to build a tower. You would first of all draw up the plans and work out the cost. Otherwise,

you might find that halfway through the project you haven't enough money to finish it. You'd have to abandon the work and people would laugh at you for being so foolish."

Anyone who wants to build a home for God in their heart must first of all work out if they can afford the cost and commitment.

"As another example," said Jesus, "what king would march to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his army was big enough to conquer the other king's army? If it wasn't, then the king would send his ambassadors to his enemy, to find peaceful ways to end the war. In the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless you give up all the things you love most." ●

Read also: Luke 14: 25-33



BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER
122

1 In 1 Samuel, ch.18, what was the name of Saul's daughter who married King David?

2 In Matthew, ch.1, how many women are named in his genealogy of Jesus?

3 In Mark, ch.1, what was the name of the apostle Peter's brother?

4 In Luke, ch.8, what was the name of the synagogue leader whose daughter Jesus healed?

5 In Matthew ch.10, Alphaeus was the father of which apostle?

6 In Job ch.42, how many more sons did Job have after his time of testing had finished?

£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 122, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 31st October 2025.

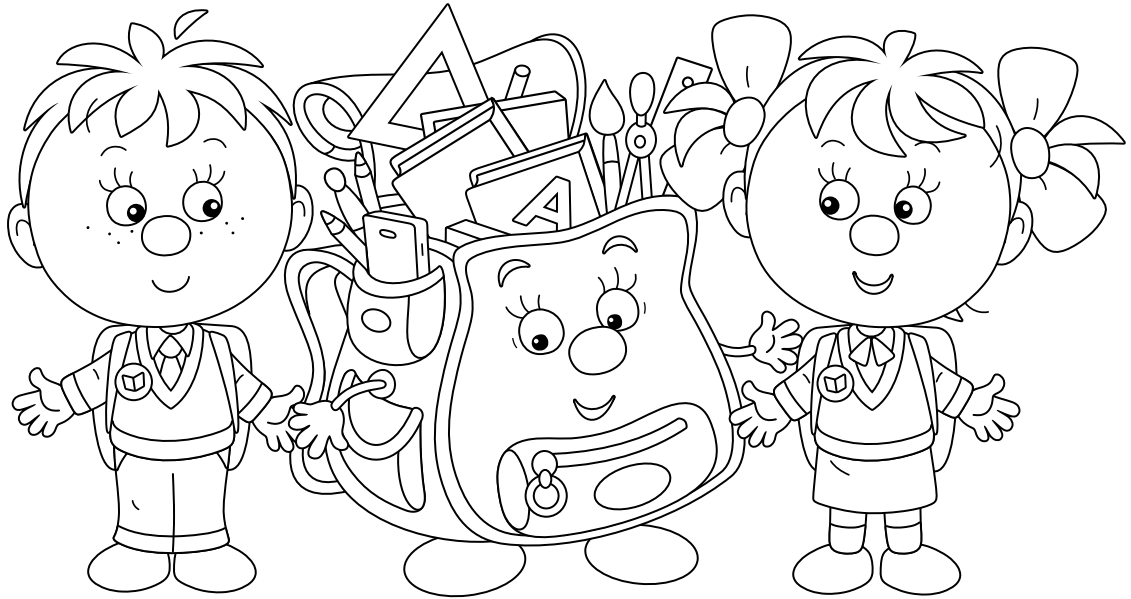
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WORD SEARCH

Match these words with the correct image and crossword space.

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HELICOPTER
BICYCLE
BUS
BUS
POLICE CAR
AIR BALLOON
PLANE
AMBULANCE
FIRE TRUCK
TAXI



Image: Shutterstock



Red Squirrel Magic

By **Elizabeth McArdle**

Did you know that Red Squirrels are one of 81 squirrel species found on the planet. These delightful creatures, known for their reddish fur, spend most of their time high in the tree canopy. In wintertime, their red furry coats fade to a brownish grey. Their scientific name, *Sciurus vulgaris* may sound somewhat rude, however, this is not the case. The word *vulgaris* means common or ordinary and as we shall see, red squirrels are anything but ordinary.

If you are ever walking in a woodland or forest and hear a chuk, chuk sound, chances are that it will be a squirrel. Their long hind limbs, nimble fingers and double-jointed ankles, enable them to leap from branch

to branch and they even make it look easy. Red squirrels have strong bushy tails which help them to balance while moving in the treetops. Their tail also keeps them warm in winter and in cold weather, the squirrel curls into a ball, wrapping its tail around its body like a snuggly blanket.

Red squirrels rear their young in dreys. These dreys are football shaped structures made primarily from twigs, leaves and bark. They are lined with the softest mosses, fur and feathers to create a warm and insulated home for their young. The kittens, as baby squirrels are known, are born blind, deaf and without fur. They are entirely dependent on mother squirrel; her constant care and nutrient-rich milk ensure they grow up strong and healthy.

We are very grateful to God for squirrels. In many places all over the world, millions of trees are planted by forgetful squirrels that do not remember where they buried their winter store of nuts. In spring they germinate creating new forests which enhance biodiversity and make life better for all creatures on planet earth. ●



Image: Shutterstock



1. What happened when the teacher tied all the kids' shoelaces together?
2. Why can't you work in an orange juice factory during school hours?
3. Why did the kid study on an airplane?
4. What is the smartest bug?
5. Why do calculators make great friends?
6. What did the triangle say to the circle?

1. They had a big class trip.
2. Because you can't concentrate.
3. He wanted a higher education.
4. A spelling bee.
5. You can count on them.
6. You're pointless.



COMPETITION WINNERS MAY / JUNE 2025



**Harvey
Ankorn**
Solihull

**Zavo
Doffay**
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upon Thames

1

2

Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under

**May Alice
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Skegness

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Simpkin**
Manchester

1

2

Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over

See article on page 6

See article on page 16

2025 SEPTEMBER APPEAL

Columban Missionaries are standing on the shoulders of the late Fr. Brian Gore, a gentle giant committed to integral human development, organic farming and reforestation in the Philippines. Fr. Brian was laid to rest in April 2025, but his legacy lives on.

Your donations are helping to reforest 60 hectares on the Filipino island of Negros and to provide work for Subanen and Higaonon families in Mindanao. In Britain, we link schools to biodiversity projects in the Philippines, Fiji and Pakistan. At St. Columban's, near Birmingham, we welcome inner city children to experience the wonder of creation.

Please donate to our September Appeal

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THE SEASON OF CREATION
1ST SEPTEMBER TO 4TH OCTOBER.**



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“Indigenous and local communities, mountains, rivers and seas under threat of aggressive development are also places of forgiveness and renewal; by caring for the land, we are recovering an age-old wisdom rooted in God's love for all creation.”

John Din

Columban Lay Missionary



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