

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

NOVEMBER 2025

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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

'The Way': on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Photo: Columban Missionary, Fr Alvaro Martinez.



Life is what happens between the two great mysteries of birth and death. I work among a tribal people in Pakistan. They live in mud and timber houses on land owned by their landlords. They are usually in debt to these landlords for whom they work and so they are called bonded-labourers.

Some years ago, I was visiting a village of ten families. It was early evening. The intense heat of the day was beginning to subside and there was a hint of a cool breeze rising. We celebrated Mass on the ground of the small mud-floored courtyard. Colourful quilts were spread on the mud floor for people to sit on. A large tin box, which contained a family's 'valuables', was brought out and covered with a cloth. This served as the altar. There were a few hens running around and a few tethered goats watching on.

During Mass there was a bit of a commotion as a few women got up and left Mass for one of the little thatched mud houses some yards away. The rest of us continued with Mass. When Mass finished, I sat with the men, chatting and having a cup of tea, when word came through that a young woman had given birth while Mass was taking place, and the women who had

left the Mass did so to help her deliver her new-born. Thankfully mother and child were well, which, unfortunately, is often not the case in this kind of context.

As I sat there with the men and sipped sweet milky tea, I reflected on the birth of a child while Mass was being celebrated. I was struck by the fact that I, as the male priest, was saying the words of consecration: "This is my body given up for you," as a young woman nearby was giving her body to bring to birth new life. As I said the words, "This is the cup of my blood poured out for you," this young woman shed her blood to give new life.

If there is any group of people who can claim a unique insight into what is going on when we gather to celebrate Eucharist; if there is any group of people who have a deep intuition of what the signs, the gestures and the words of the Mass try to express, and who have an intuition of the depth of its mystery, then it must be mothers! ●

Fr Tomás King

01. Parkari Kholi tribal community with whom the Columbans work in the Sindh province, Pakistan. Photo: Cathal King.




RADICAL VISIONARY

St Columbanus was a man who crossed borders, literally and figuratively, and was the first to speak about a European identity. For his feast day on 23rd November we publish an extract of former president of Ireland Dr Mary McAleese's talk 'Columbanus, the Man from Myshall' which was given as part of the XXV Columbanus Day International Meeting in Carlow.

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The beautiful Italian town of Bobbio keeps alive the story of St Columbanus just as passionately as we Irish keep alive the story of St Patrick. It is the story of a stranger who came among them and founded his last monastery and died there on 23rd November 615AD.

St Columbanus' story endures and we are entitled to wonder why? He and his companions were first and foremost - *peregrini pro Christo* - pilgrims for Christ. Columbanus' faith was the driving force that allowed him as a middle-aged monk, already a successful celebrated career behind him, to set out across the seas with twelve companions bound for the madhouse that was Europe, where the new Christian religion was teetering on the brink of vanishing. He had heard the awful stories from the refugees coming to Ireland. He knew he was in a place of relative safety with no pressure on him to leave. He knew he was heading into serious uncertainty and trouble. Columbanus believed with a ferocious certainty that love of one's neighbour could change the world, could bring peace out of war and harmony out of discord.

Fortunately, we know a lot about the

life of Columbanus because he is the first Irishman to have left a body of his own writing, including poetry, sermons and letters, some of them rather cross letters to the pope of the day. He is also the first Irishman to have been the subject of a biography. His medieval life is in fact well documented including his often argumentative nature but also his great courage and forward thinking.

It was Columbanus (543-615) who was the first to describe Europe as a potentially collaborative union of distinct nations; the first to coin the phrase '*totius Europae*', the first to persuade the warmongering leaders of a broken Europe, that it was possible to be Irish, Frankish, German, Spanish and also to share a common European identity which would be a shared platform for building a sustainable peace and prosperity through partnership. In a documentary I made several years ago about his life I describe him as the First European. It was not an exaggeration.

Columbanus' radical vision for a shared Europe of the nations would become the inspiration for the miracle we know today as the European Union. From the still warm ashes of twentieth century

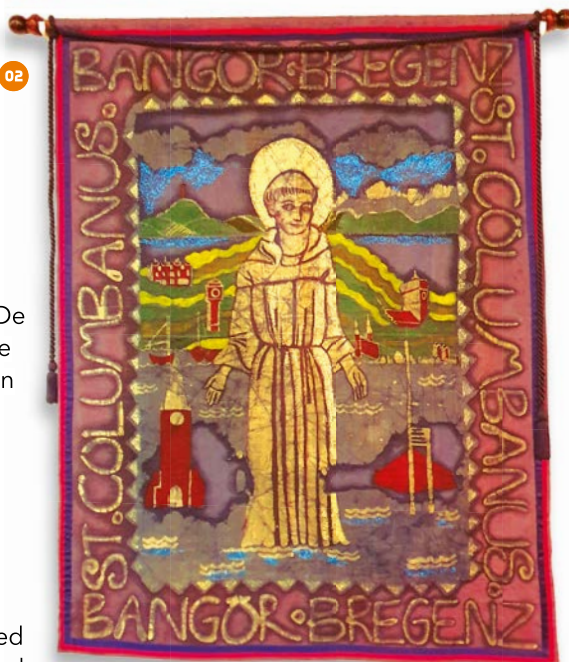
02 wars there emerged in the minds of four Catholic intellectual and political leaders the memory of an idea articulated by the medieval Irish monk Columbanus for a Europe of the nations. They fanned those medieval embers into a flame.

Robert Schumann, Jean Monet, Alcide De Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer became the founding fathers of the European Union, an egalitarian homeland for all, the best and noblest idea anyone in the world has had in millennia except Christ himself. In July 1950 they met in secret in Luxeuil, the site of a monastery founded by Columbanus. They met on the margins of a conference celebrating the 1400th anniversary of the birth of St Columbanus. Schuman described Columbanus as having “willed and achieved a spiritual union between the principal European countries of his time”, calling him “the patron saint of all those who now seek to build a united Europe”.

Among those present at that secret meeting were members of the Irish government, Winston Churchill and the papal nuncio to France whom we know today as Pope John XXIII. A few years later he would match the historic watershed created by the European Union by convoking the Second Vatican Council and asserting the Church was to become a garden not a mausoleum.

In 1963, Pope John XXIII published the greatest papal encyclical so far - *Pacem in Terris* - on the rights and obligations of people and their states, as well as proper interstate relations. It emphasises human dignity and human equality, endorses women's rights, immigrant and refugee rights, argues strongly against the arms race and advocates nuclear non-proliferation, support for the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The imprint of that meeting in Luxeuil is on every page of this encyclical, the imprint of Columbanus is also on every page.

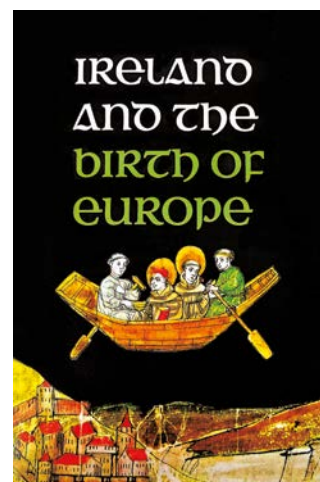
If you doubt Columbanus' relevance to our times take a look at our world with the existential polycrisis all around as humanity and the earth grow weaker not stronger. He is the author of the Sacred Ordinary, an appeal to religious and secular, to politicians and kings, to find the commonalities which could yet save us from the looming dangers which impact all. To see Columbanus only in the



stones of the monasteries he founded all over Europe is to miss the point. It is his life-enhancing vision of the human person and our earthly home and its flora and fauna that is the real light left by Columbanus.

His words are inscribed on the wall of the Columbanus chapel in St Peter's Basilica in Rome: *'si tollis libertatem tollis dignitatem'* - 'if you take away human freedom you destroy human dignity'. Those words are to be found too in the first Article of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (declared 2000, came into force 2009): "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." From his grave in Bobbio Columbanus speaks still to a world that needs to hear and heed his voice. ●

01. Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin making a presentation of a bell, modelled on the St Columbanus Bell, to former president of Ireland, Dr Mary McAleese following her talk 'Columbanus, the Man from Myshall' on 12th July 2025 as part of the XXV Columbanus Day International Meeting in Carlow. Photo: Patrick Bramley/Kildare & Leighlin Diocese.
02. Artwork depicting St Kolumban in the Church of St Kolumban in Bregenz (Austria). Bregenz is associated with St Columbanus because he founded a monastery there around 611 AD with his companions, though they only stayed for about a year before the outbreak of war forced them to move on to Bobbio. Photo: Sarah Mac Donald.
03. Illustration from the exhibition 'Ireland and the birth of Europe' which Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (UCG) launched in Carlow County Museum on 11th July as part of the XXV Columbanus Day International Meeting in Carlow.



Anyone who wishes to explore St Columbanus' life and legacy a bit further:

- Scan the QR code to listen to this radio drama: 'St Columbanus – the First European'.
- Rite & Reason: As Pope Leo XIV has reminded us, the Irish missionary's perspective is as relevant now as it was more than 14 centuries ago. Read an opinion piece by Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin for The Irish Times on Sunday, 13 July 2025. Scan the QR code to read the article.
- 'Mary McAleese and the Man Who Saved Europe', directed by Declan McGrath, is a documentary available on YouTube. You can watch it by scanning the QR code.





ST COLUMBANUS

An extract from Fr Pat Colgan's homily for the Feast of St Columbanus.

Fr Pat Colgan is from Belfast. He was ordained a Columban in 1994 and spent 18 years in Fiji before he was appointed to the Society's General Council in 2012. He returned to Fiji in 2018 and is now based in Ireland.

01. Bobbio, Italy. Photo: Shutterstock

02. Statue of St Columbanus by Claude Grange outside the Basilica of Ss Peter and Paul in Luxeuil (France). St Columbanus founded a monastery in Luxeuil after his arrival in the region in 590/591AD. It was built on the ruins of the Roman settlement, Luxovium. Photo: Sarah Mac Donald.

If I am honest, I have always struggled to establish a relationship with St Columbanus – he is from “so long ago”, was so uncompromising in his preaching, strict on Gall and all his monks, and had nerves of steel in crossing the Alps at the age of 70! Put simply, to me, he's not somebody you want to ‘cosy up’ to.

He entered the monastery of Bangor, under Comgall, when he was 20 and led a life of prayer, penance and study. When he was about 50, following the Irish “*peregrinatio pro Christo*”, Columbanus left with 12 companions for the European continent. They landed on the Breton coast in 590.

Welcomed by the King of the Franks of Austrasia (now France), they asked for a small piece of land.

They were given the ancient Roman fortress of Annegray, totally ruined and covered by forest. Within a few months the monks had built their first hermitage.

The fame of these foreign religious spread rapidly, attracting both pilgrims and penitents. Many young men asked to be accepted by the community. It was not

long before the foundation of a second monastery was required. It was built on the ruins of an ancient spa, Luxeuil-les-bains. This monastery was to become the centre of the Irish missionary outreach in Europe. A third monastery was erected at Fontaine, further north.

Columbanus lived at Luxeuil for almost 20 years. Here he wrote the *Regula Monachorum* for his followers. With *De Poenitentiarum Misura Taxanda* Columbanus introduced Confession and private and frequent penance on the Continent. These innovations roused the suspicion of local bishops, a suspicion that became hostile when Columbanus rebuked them openly for their immoral practices. Columbanus also came into conflict with King Theuderic for his adulterous relations. This culminated in a Decree of Expulsion in 610 banishing Columbanus and all the monks of Irish origin from Luxeuil.

When, in 612 or 613, the King of the Lombards allocated to him a plot of land in Bobbio, (Italy) Columbanus founded a new monastery which was later to become a cultural centre on a par with Monte Cassino. Columbanus died in Bobbio on 23rd November 615.

According to Pope Benedict in his homily on 9th June 2008, Columbanus's message is an appeal to conversion and detachment from earthly goods. When he faced up to the corruption of the powerful, Columbanus is reminiscent of John the Baptist.

We as Columbans have rightly identified with and been inspired by his ideal of *peregrinatio* – being an exile for Christ – giving up our land and our family to spread the Gospel elsewhere. We see in him a man abandoned to God's will – much like Ed Galvin's famous dictum that the reason he went to China was not to convert the Chinese but to do God's will, and God's will could change hour by hour. ●

COULD WE WALK BY?

MANGHOY KHAMIAN?



The Turas Columbanus Interfaith Pilgrimage 2025 was a two-day journey that intertwined encounters with other faiths in places in Ireland that hold the memories of St Columbanus. It was a grace to start out from a church on the monastery grounds of St Finian's in Clonard, Co Meath with an interfaith prayer, orientation and historical input. This gave me, a stranger from the global south, the opportunity to quietly ask permission of the land before setting off - a custom that respects and upholds the sacredness of the land.

The enthusiasm and vibrancy of the group which exuded joy and gratitude was a blessing from the outset of this pilgrimage. As a Columban Sister, it was a privilege to walk in the footsteps of our patron saint, Columbanus. We encountered a soul-nurturing panorama, which was a treat to the senses: welcome shade in the heat, as well as strips of wild vegetation and fascinating blooms, berries, ancient wells and flowing rivers. They offered glimpses of how and what the land had been like 1,434 years ago.

There was a sense of homecoming as I listened to the stories of the land, its people and traditions associated with the ancient sacred wells. The latter mirrored my indigenous roots which reveres water as a source of life and healing. This land not only provided a route but also respite, hospitality and prayer sanctuaries for Columbanus on his way to Bangor. The land's innate numinosity contributed to the Saint's spiritual insight of "understanding creation in order to know the Creator".

The pilgrimage was also a journey of self-encounter. Anticipated with much excitement, it posed a challenging invitation to go beyond the familiar and encounter diverse accents, races and religions, offering the possibilities of friendship and collaboration. It also offered the chance for some solitary walking in which to savour the peace and feel connected with the land and become part of it and allow Christ to walk with us. Energised and inspired by these personal encounters, it enabled me to more readily open myself up to sharing the walk with co-pilgrims, to listen to and see them, and consequently recognise a part of myself in them.

The pilgrimage was an encounter of shared conversations about places, historical events and people, culture, faith traditions, common interests, family, friends, social issues, mission and other matters. Most importantly, it was an interfaith communion with the Divine. This is my first pilgrimage in Ireland, a walk of ordinary encounters but one of accepting and respecting differences on a broader path while tasting the joy of self-expansion in God's inclusive embrace. ●

Sr Karen M. Lanipao



01. Prayer during the Columbanus Interfaith Pilgrimage in the forest at Dalgaun Park. Photo: Pat Colgan.

THE WAY



02

The Camino de Santiago de Compostela never leaves you the same writes Columban Missionary Fr Alvaro Martinez.



St James the Apostle, who, according to popular tradition, is buried in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, was a man chosen by Jesus and a favoured witness to Jesus' public life, death and resurrection. In his apostolic and missionary zeal, he embarked on a pilgrimage to the lands that are now known as Spain and Portugal. His evangelizing efforts began to bear fruit, leading some to become disciples, and it was they who would carry on the missionary work in these Mediterranean regions.

Tradition also indicates that before her death, the Virgin Mary called each apostle through apparitions to return to Jerusalem to be with her in their final days. It is here that the apostle James met his martyrdom, which is not only a painful death but also a testament to a missionary life dedicated to preaching the Gospel.

Tradition tells us that his remains were taken back to his missionary lands where he was buried, with his tomb not discovered until the 9th century. When his remains were found, a church was built for this missionary apostle, which then sparked pilgrimages to visit his tomb and rekindle missionary zeal.

Over the years, this devotion has brought together thousands of people each year who make the journey to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

I was one of this year's pilgrims. It was both an opportunity and a blessing to walk 'The Way.' I set out from Baiona, situated in the region of Galicia in northern Spain, and walked each day until I reached the church associated with this missionary apostle.

The route is challenging; each day brings its own struggles and pains. However, one of the spiritual graces I experienced along the way was listening to God reveal how my entire life has been directed towards missionary apostolate. I recognised once again that He exists in the personal history of each individual and in my own history, urging me to follow in the footsteps of this missionary apostle, who witnessed to the life of Jesus and his resurrection. I realised that, in some ways, my missionary life has also involved observing and learning from the experience of Jesus and discovering the spiritual traces of his resurrection through sharing as a missionary.

Like every journey, the Camino had its

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

www.missionlens.cl

01. Fr Alvaro walking the Camino in Galicia.

02. A statue of St James the Apostle, who, according to popular tradition, is buried in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

03. A sign wishing pilgrims: 'Buen Camino!'

04. Fr Alvaro in the plaza in front of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.



tough days. My feet hurt, and with each new location, a question arose, almost as if inviting me to stop: why continue walking so many kilometres? Why endure the discomfort? Without a doubt, this question, like chairs on the way, urged me to stop during the missionary pilgrim journey. These days were the hardest because I had to answer my questions in every prayer and at daily Mass, which I attended out of love for God and the desire to deepen my experience of the Risen One.

On the other hand, along the way, I met many people from diverse countries, languages and cultures. Sharing a nugget of information, words of encouragement, or a short or long chat transform the Camino

into a multicultural and interreligious experience, as each pilgrim has motivations for walking 'The Way' that change or deepen along the way. Simply put, no one arrives in Santiago de Compostela the same.

Upon arriving at the Plaza de Santiago, you feel a surge of joy, not only from the company of thousands of pilgrims, the shouts of happiness, the songs of triumph, and the ache in your feet, but also from the deepest affirmation that 'The Way' was worth it. Every step and every refusal of the chairs that urged us to stop brought us to the foot of the tomb of Santiago or James, the apostle, missionary, and martyr.

At the end of the journey, I had the blessing of concelebrating Mass in the cathedral and participating in the *Botafumeiro* ceremony in this church. It was an experience rich in culture and tradition, reflecting how the scent of incense that spreads throughout every church evokes the good aroma each pilgrim carries from their experience of 'The Way.' For me, this experience was embodied in sharing the experience of Jesus and, above all, the joy of the risen Christ. ●



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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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Sr Erisa Lee recalls how Columban Fathers and Sisters in Korea made a deep impression on her family. They inspired her vocation as a missionary and helped her appreciate the teachings of St Columbanus.

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SALT DOLL

From ancient times, Korea's winters have been fiercely cold, prompting us to craft various types of *kimchi* and preserve them throughout the long season. Just last week, I planted radish seeds, the essential ingredient for *kimchi*, in the convent garden in Chunchon, hoping that by early November, they will bloom into crisp, vibrant roots.

Though the days still radiate summer's warmth, early autumn in the traditional calendar has arrived, when Korea's sky becomes a sketchbook of clouds. When light filters through those drifting forms, it feels as though heavenly gates are

parting. In those moments, I think of St Columbanus's words: "To know the Creator, behold the creation." In the sky, clouds, light, seeds and growth, I meet the Creator and offer Him my heartfelt praise.

I first heard the unfamiliar name Columbanus from my parents. They mentioned him occasionally. My father, a military officer who served in a remote, underdeveloped part of Gangwon Province, once met a humble foreign priest who was a Columban Father and walked in worn sneakers to feed and shelter orphaned children. My father would travel to the shelter once or twice a month, giving haircuts to the children, conversing with the priest, learning from his kind example, and his heart would be deeply moved.

My mother, from Jeju Island, recalled the Columban Sisters she encountered on the beaches of Hyepje – graceful as cranes, their waists adorned with large rosaries. She also remembered that the parish priest who rushed to ring the church bell when my uncle passed away was a Columban

Father himself. They would show me the faded black-and-white photographs of those memories.

The stories of the Columban missionaries, lingering from childhood, felt like oral fairy tales. Through my parents' words, the name Columbanus became a delicate whisper in my memory – an aromatic essence.

Perhaps due to that gentle influence (or something more subtle), I entered the Missionary Sisters of St Columban and became one myself. I have served as they did, in Peru and now in Korea. Within the congregation, I studied St Columbanus's life, his faith, his example. I realised that I had already learned his way of life by witnessing the missionaries who live it.

His words: "Let us belong to Christ, not to ourselves" call me to live for Him and belong entirely to Christ. I strive to embody that aromatic presence, matching the name I bear. From childhood, I learned that our lives and the subtle scent they emit allow others to perceive the fragrance of Christ. And yet, like St Columbanus, I remain human, prone to mistakes, to hurting and being hurt, to giving and seeking forgiveness.

Salt Doll

*Like a salt doll
descending into the sea
to fathom the ocean's depth,
to fathom your depth
I plunged into your blood –
I, like that salt doll,
melted away
without a trace.*

- Ryu Si-hwa

I end this reflection with Ryu Si-hwa's poem 'Salt Doll' which beautifully captures the spirit of St Columbanus and our missionary vocation. Like a salt doll dissolving into the endless sea, we dissolve ourselves into the sea called Christ. Remembering St Columbanus, may we be dissolved into Him, belong wholly to Him, not to ourselves. ●

Sr Erisa Lee is from Korea. She has served on mission in Peru and is currently working in her home country of Korea.

Salt Doll poem by Ryu Si-hwa. Inspired by Anthony de Mello's parable of the salt doll that went to the sea.

01. Sr Erisa tends God's creation in the convent garden.
02. The city of Chunchon in Korea where the Missionary Sisters of St Columban are based.

**“Let us be
Christ's, not
our own”**

– St Columban

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"GOOD NEWS FROM WUHAN"

When Fr John Boles visited Wuhan he learned about the history of the Columban connection with the Chinese city and heard some words of hope from young Columban missionary, Fr Taemoon Kwon.

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“Wuhan! A name now notorious as the probable source of the COVID-19 pandemic. But, for Catholics and especially for Columbans, Wuhan means good news! It is where the Columban missionary endeavour began over one hundred years ago as the Maynooth Mission to China. Thanks to the early work of the Columban Fathers and missionaries like them, it is where Christianity still thrives, in spite of war, revolution and disease.

The ‘Spirit of Wuhan’ continues to inspire young men to join us, and to give renewed purpose to their vocation.

One such man is Fr Taemoon Kwon from Seoul in Korea. Ordained a Columban missionary priest in 2010, five years later

he was delighted to be appointed not only to China, but specifically to Wuhan, where it had all begun for the Columbans.

Fr Taemoon was asked to work mainly in the city itself, giving retreats and spiritual direction

to Chinese nuns, priests and seminarians. However, it was in the nearby countryside that he underwent an experience that was to transform his attitude, not only to China and the Chinese, but also to his own faith and to the person of Jesus.

“In 2018 I got a phone call from the pastor of a rural parish, a good friend of mine, inviting me to spend Holy Week with him,” Fr Taemoon recalls. “I was curious to see how the Catholic Church in China celebrates Holy Week, so I felt happy to accept his kind invitation”. The village in question was typical of rural settlements in the Yangtze Valley of central China, surrounded by arable fields and bordered by water. “I loved the setting”, says Taemoon, especially as the lake was, “encircled by bright yellow flowers called rapeseed”. As well as farming, many of the locals were fishermen on the lake, “just like Jesus’s disciples living in Galilee”.

About one in ten of the people were Catholic, the rest were mainly Buddhist or atheist. Something which struck Taemoon “was seeing the portrait of Mao Zedong hanging on the wall in every house”, irrespective of the religion of the inhabitants. To see Mao’s portrait juxtaposed with an image of the crucifixion or of Our Lady was quite a novel sight to foreign eyes!

In the light of the foregoing, he was quite unprepared for what unfolded on Good Friday. First, the solemn piety of the procession impressed him. The Way



02



and even his face". He was amazed. The Chinese are normally so restrained.

Subsequently, reflecting on this remarkable incident, Fr Taemoon realised that it was having a profound effect on his spiritual outlook. If a people normally so self-contained could give vent to such an outpouring of sympathy for the crucified Saviour, how strong must be this idea of a Jesus not just suffering for us, but suffering with us. A vulnerable Jesus, defenceless as a baby, pleading for our help, our care, our love. A Jesus representing all of us, when we are in danger and in need of support and compassion... like in times of a pandemic.

"If that love which each person has in their heart could be expressed in action to all who are in need," Taemoon concluded, "then this love could save us all and Jesus

of the Cross left the confines of the church and wound its way round the village. It was led by an assistant with incense and two others with candles, followed by fourteen of the faithful bearing the Stations and the priest with the cross. The rest of the worshippers came after, in perfect order and singing hymns. "I found this procession so beautiful. I really loved it and felt touched."

The climax was the Adoration of the Cross back at the church. This cross was life-sized. Fr Taemoon and the parish priest began proceedings conventionally enough by kissing the feet of Jesus. What followed first shocked and then moved Fr Taemoon. When it was the people's turn, they came forward and with great emotion fell upon the cross. "They kissed not only Jesus's feet, but also his ankle, waist, shoulders



could complete his mission of the cross", which of course, came soon after with the Resurrection. "I pray that the experience of powerlessness and helplessness, like the image of the crucified Christ, will help us to see what we need to do to build a better world." ●



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

Fr Taemoon Kwon was on mission in China from 2015 to 2018. He is currently helping train young men to be Columban priests in our seminary in Manila, Philippines.

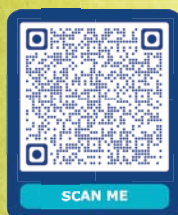
01. Fr Taemoon Kwon from Korea in the countryside in the Yangtze Valley of central China.
02. The parish church.
03. The Way of the Cross procession in the small rural village.
04. Columban Missionary Fr Taemoon with parishioners.
05. The ubiquitous portrait of Mao Zedong hanging on the wall in every house juxtaposed with an image of the crucifixion and Our Lady.

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FAREWELL MARIA WAQAILITI

01



02

November is the month when we remember our beloved dead. Fr John McEvoy recalls a dedicated teacher and woman of faith in Fiji for whom many tears were shed at her funeral.

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I was privileged to be invited to say the Requiem Mass for Maria Waqailiti. She was a woman of extraordinary faith and was one hundred percent committed to her vocation as a Catholic teacher. I first met Maria when I was parish priest of St Pius X Parish in Raiwaqa (2015 – 2019). She was then a volunteer teacher at the School for the Blind which was located within the confines of the parish. She invited me to the school to conduct paraliturgies on special occasions like the beginning and ending of the school year and the beginning of Lent or at Christmas time.

She began to accompany the Catholic children attending the school for the blind to Sunday Mass in the parish. Maria and her little band of children became a familiar sight at our early Sunday morning Masses in Raiwaqa. She prepared these children for their First Confessions and First Holy

Communion. She soon joined the parish team of Catholic teachers who conducted catechism classes every Sunday morning for the children of the parish. She took on the responsibility to prepare up to 40 children each year for their First Holy Communion. She had a wonderful way with the children – they were captivated with her bible stories and teaching methods. She never had any trouble with discipline in her classes.

When the Head of Commission for Faith Formation in the parish retired, I had no hesitation in asking Maria to take on the role and she agreed willingly. Her reports at the parish pastoral council meetings were always interesting, challenging and concerned as to how the faith could be passed on to the young people of Fiji.

Maria qualified as a teacher in 1974 and held many teaching posts throughout



the country until she became the first lay principal of the Marist Brothers Primary School in Suva when the Marists left. Some of her students speak of her with great affection and how she managed and controlled the school without effort or fuss. Later, she was appointed to a government school in Suva where she raised standards to new heights. She finished her teaching career at Yat Sen Chinese school as the Fiji government required all teachers and civil servants to retire at the age of 55. A fact that was not widely known about Maria was that she was diagnosed with cancer way back

in 1994. But she never spoke about it; she kept going despite her illness and continued giving of herself.

There was a sense of loss and sadness among those who attended her Requiem Mass in the Church of St Pius X, Raiwaqa. The congregation included her schoolmates, her teacher confreres, her ex-students and of course members of her immediate family. Many a tear was shed as her casket was carried out of the church. Maria whose faith I admired so much: "Thank you for your witness and your self-giving. Rest in peace with your God and Creator." ●

Fr John McEvoy was ordained in 1972. He served on mission in Fiji and is now based in Ireland.

01. Maria Waqailiti was a "dedicated teacher and woman of faith".
02. The Funeral Mass in Fiji for Maria Waqailiti presided over by Columban Fr John McEvoy.
03. "She had a wonderful way with the children - they were captivated with her bible stories and teaching methods."

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:

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COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES
 BRITAIN



"THANK YOU FOR SPENDING THE TIME WITH US"

The life stories of 37 Irish missionaries are the subject of Dr Carmel Gallagher's recent publication, *'Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society'* in which she highlights examples of the work done by missionaries and the way their experiences enriched them.

'Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society' is a sociological study of the Irish missionary diaspora by Dr Carmel Gallagher. Published by Routledge (2024).

01. Launch of *'Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society'* by Sean Fleming, Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora (2nd from left) with Dr Carmel Gallagher (1st from left) and AMRI Secretary General Gerard Gallagher (3rd from left) and Fr Tim Lehane SVD, former president of AMRI. Photo: John McElroy.

02. *'Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society'* is published by Routledge. The sociological study interviewed 37 Catholic missionary men and women mainly religious sisters and priests who have returned to Ireland having worked in Asia, Africa, Central and South America.

The Irish missionary movement is one of the most significant contributions Ireland made to the world in its first 50 years of independence. Between 1920 and 1970 over 30,000 men and women joined missionary orders. Matt Moran reveals in his 2016 book, *The legacy of Irish missionaries lives on*. Today Irish missionaries are a rapidly dwindling group. According to the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI), in 2022 there were just 626 Irish Catholic missionaries active outside Ireland. Yet, the influence of Irish missionaries can be seen in numerous ways, including Ireland's overseas aid programme, social and environmental justice work and in reverse evangelisation.

Thirty-seven women and men from 20 different religious orders, along with a small number of lay people, who had served in 34 countries mainly in Asia, Africa, as well as Central and South America took part in the research for *Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society*. Through in-depth interviews the missionaries told their stories and reflected on the meaning of missionary work in their lives.

There were mixed motivations evident in the path to becoming a missionary ranging from influences at home and school, a strong sense of social justice, inner conviction, religious magazines, personal contacts etc. However, it was through the work itself and the unfolding of the teachings of Vatican II that their commitment to missionary work grew. Many stated that the original decision to become a missionary had to be reaffirmed time and time again with new opportunities, challenges, learning and discernment.

The following are common themes addressed by the missionaries: the idea of not having all the answers and learning from the people and culture while giving the 'Good News' of the Gospels. The missionaries recognised their total dependence on the people among whom they worked. They came to greatly admire their culture, their resilience and their rootedness. Genuine cross-cultural friendships were formed.

Maurice who worked with sugar cane workers in the Philippines summed up a common view of the missionary project among the missionaries interviewed: "We went out thinking that we were bringing the joy of the Gospel. The truth is, God was there long before we were. God was with the people."

Working collaboratively with people and with civil society groups became the *modus operandi* of missionaries. In South America and the Philippines missionaries experienced a church that was strongly influenced by Liberation Theology. For example, in the Philippines and Brazil, missionaries helped farmers and workers secure better land and worker rights.

Mission work became firmly focused on helping the most marginalised including prisoners, women in prostitution and people who had AIDS. Explaining the missionary aims behind a health and development programme for women and children, Martha referenced the words of Jesus in the Bible, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full" (John, 10:10). This programme,

02



RETIRED MISSIONARIES
AND FAITH IN
A CHANGING SOCIETY

Carmel Gallagher



developed in the 1980s by a female paediatrician and several bishops, trained community leaders, mainly women, who would visit families, identify needs and help to transform lives through interventions on health, nutrition, education and citizenship.

Helen who worked as a doctor in a number of African countries described how she and the other Sisters in her community were there as “ambassadors of Christ, being his hands and continuing his healing ministry”. Anne developed an outreach service to people who had AIDS in a country in south-east Asia in the early decades of the disease providing palliative care at first and then treatment as drugs became available.

The missionaries had a strong commitment to accompanying people who were marginalised or in great need. This approach sometimes involved considerable risk to the missionaries themselves when they supported people caught up in violence or civil strife. Cathal spoke about his interfaith work in the Philippines where Islam was the majority religion and where there has been a long history of tension between Christians and Muslims: “There was this great effort to understand them and for them to understand us... part of my best years was spent in dialogue with people of the Islamic faith.”

Darragh spoke about being asked to negotiate with the Coastguard in the Philippines to give fisher people a chance to catch fish as they were strangled with having to give bribes, compete with better equipped sea-going trawlers and deal with pirates. He did manage to get a short reprieve for them and recalled what the leader of the group said to him: “Thank you for spending the time with us.”

Bernadette worked with families caught up in drugs-related violence in a south American country whose children had been murdered by criminal gangs or by the police. She also spoke about her work with women in prostitution and described the degradation they experienced and their despair if their children are taken from them: “A lot of it was befriending and opening opportunities for the women, if they wanted ... basically to tell these people that they were important, that somebody... would stand by them... The self-esteem of these women is down in the gutter.”

Denis Linehan, in his 2021 article ‘Common ground: How missionaries shape Ireland’s global connections’ argues that declining numbers does not mean that missionaries are a spent force: “Back in Ireland, even in their 80s, many retired missionaries are vital and steely-eyed, ready to share their experiences with famine, child soldiers, and HIV/AIDS. Theirs is a collective voice tempered by the paradox of being globally engaged but displaced from the current focus of Irish society.” It is important to record the stories, experiences and wisdom of Irish missionaries while they are still in our midst. ●

THE FEAST DAY OF ST CECILIA, PATRONESS OF MUSICIANS, IS 22ND NOVEMBER. WE HONOUR THE SAINT WITH A POEM BY COLUMBAN MISSIONARY FR CYRIL LOVETT.



Music

On special feasts the local Confraternity Band
played as they marched to and from the church.
Adept at walking backwards,
eyes glued to the fingers and faces of the players
I accompanied and concentrated on each one:
melodies voiced on trumpet, clarinet and flute,
the blurped bass of euphonium and trombone,
time thumped on the big bass drum;
from the midst the din was deafening
but when I let them get ten yards ahead
their voices blended in miraculous accord.
I had to pass the narrow stairs that
skirted the asthmatic, wheezing bellows
to reach my vantage point
in the organ gallery of the parish church.
The organist, gentle and restrained
as he set off the choir’s counterpoint,
reserved the greatest splendour for the end.
Then, as the congregation streamed out
he unleashed the organ’s mighty power
and I, by then his last remaining admirer,
felt the timbers vibrate and throb
as I rode the thundering waves of sound.
Seven decades have passed
and my spirit continues to thrive
in that special zone of transcendence
where wonder, prayer and music abide.

- Cyril Lovett

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YEARS

**Fr Malachy
Hanratty**



Japan

Platinum **70**
YEARS
Jubilee Sisters

**Sr Eithne
Foley**



Korea, Scotland

**Sr Laurentia
Harvey**



Korea

**Sr Kathleen
McHugh**



Korea

**Sr Elizabeth
Taaffe**



Korea, London

Diamond **60**
YEARS
Jubilee Sisters

**Sr Mary
Greaney**



Hong Kong

**Sr Rita
Moore**



Korea


**Sr Nuala
Raleigh**



Hong Kong

Diamond 60
YEARS

Fr John Keenan



Philippines

Fr Maurice Hogan




Japan, Ireland

Fr Peter T. Hughes




Peru

Fr Noel Kerins



Peru

Fr Michael E. Martin



Philippines

Fr Sean McNulty



Philippines, China


Fr Anthony Cavanagh



Pakistan

Golden 50
YEARS

Fr Oliver McCrossan



Philippines, Ireland

Fr Donal O'Keeffe



Korea

Fr Paul Tierney



Fiji

Silver 25
YEARS
Jubilee Sisters

Sr Yoon Mi Kim



Peru, Pakistan

REST in PEACE



Sr Maura Dillon



Sr Mary (Margaret) Moylan



Sr Elizabeth (Betty) Monaghan

Sr Maura Dillon was born in 1926 in Dublin. Baptised Mary Teresa, she studied in Scoil Mhuire in Malborough Street, Dublin and later in St Louis College in Co Mayo. After working for a short time in the Civil Service, Maura entered the Columban Sisters in 1946. She professed First Vows in Cahiracon in 1949 and a year later she was assigned to mission in the USA where she professed Final Vows in 1954. Maura taught for many years in Los Angeles where many of the students were Hispanic migrants living in the inner-city ghettos. After study in Mundelein College in Chicago, she gained a BA followed by an MA in Theology from Marquette University. In 1968, she was assigned to the Philippines where she served for twelve years, particularly in Columban College, Olongapo. Here, she set up a catechetical centre which offered a five-year programme to students who, on graduating, would be qualified to teach in the high schools of the diocese. This new venture for the Philippines continues to train teachers today. Returning to Ireland at a time when the understanding around mission was expanding, Maura worked in the Irish Missionary Union (IMU) as a member of the team operating the National Mission Centre in Dublin. As Justice Coordinator for the Congregation in Ireland, she was one of the early members of the Burma-Ireland group. As Maura's health began to decline, she was assigned to Magheramore in 2017 and gradually moved into the Community Nursing Home. Even at this stage of her life, Maura never lost her sense of humour. On 21st June 2025, she died peacefully in the Magheramore Nursing Home.

Sr Mary (Margaret) Moylan was born on 26th August 1926. Mary was a student in St Ita's National School and later in St Raphael's in Loughrea. She graduated in Arts from University College Galway. Mary's studies were interrupted when her mother died and she assumed responsibility for assisting her father with the care of her brothers and sisters for a few years. Attracted to the Columban Sisters by the writings in the **Far East** of Sr Helen (Sheila) Lucy, Mary entered the Columban Sisters in October 1959. She professed First Vows in 1962. After this she was assigned to the Philippines where she professed Final Vows in 1967. Mary's first assignment in the Philippines was as College Dean in St Columban's College in Olongapo, a city which was the base for the American Navy. As college dean, Mary was very concerned about the influence of the city's

environment on the students. She later served in Labrador in our Columban High School and then in Malate. Here, she was involved in the development of Basic Christian Communities in an economically depressed area. While still in the Philippines, she gained an MA in Education from St Louis University in Baguio City and later an MA in Religious Studies from Mundelein University in the USA. After many years of service in the Philippines, Mary found herself in London where she took an active part in the Filipino Chaplaincy. A few years later, she was one of the pioneers in establishing a Columban community in Dublin's Killarney Court. As her mobility became increasingly restricted through severe pain, Mary was assigned to the Magheramore community and gradually to the Nursing Home. Here, Mary continued to delight all those around her with her great love for music. She died unexpectedly but peacefully in Loughshinny Nursing Home on 19th July 2025.

Sr Elizabeth (Betty) Monaghan was born on 3rd November 1935 in Philadelphia where she received her primary and secondary education. After working for a time in an office, she entered the Missionary Sisters of St Columban in 1957. Three years later, she professed First Vows. After completing courses in Radiography and Laboratory Dispensing, Betty professed Final Vows in 1965 and was assigned to mission in Condeville, Peru. Returning to the USA three years later, Betty then gained a BA in Theology from Loyola University, Chicago. After several years of service in formation and community in Silver Creek, Betty, in 1984, was once again available for mission to Peru. This time, she spent eleven years working in the parishes of Recuay, Ica and Lima. On her visits to the various villages, she reached out to the poor. When Betty once again found herself back in the USA, she made herself available to the Silver Creek community, and to her mother in her frailty. After a few short years, Betty accepted an assignment to Chile where she spent almost ten years, working in the northern region of Iquique and in pastoral work in the metropolitan shanty towns of Santiago. The last several years of her life found Betty once again serving in the community in Silver Creek. Here, she was known to both the Sisters and residents for her kindness and thoughtfulness which she displayed so eloquently. On 9th August 2025, Sr Betty died peacefully in the Silver Creek community.

May they rest in peace.



THE TOWER OF BABEL

Many years had passed and Noah's descendants gradually spread over the land. Eventually some settled in the land of Shinar.

In those days everyone in the world spoke the same language and used the same words. The people of Shinar decided to build themselves a fine city out of brick, with a tall tower that would be the highest in the world and reach right up to the heavens. They thought this would make them all famous and powerful: the envy of every other nation! No longer would they be weak, and scattered over the countryside.

While they were still making bricks and building, God came down to see what they were doing. The sight of their city, with its strong walls and its tower reaching up to the sky made him sad. These people, he saw, were full of pride and selfish ambition. Once their city was built, there would be no end to their greedy scheming; nothing would stop them.

So God confused their language and the words they spoke, so that they were all unable to understand each other. At once the building came to a stop and the tower of Babel - which took its name from the babble of sounds that everyone made - was never completed. The people left Shinar Valley and scattered in many different directions once more. ●

Read also: **Genesis 11: 1-10**

BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER
123

1 In Ruth ch.1, name Naomi's two daughters-in-law?

2 In Matthew ch.1, Jesus is referred to as the son of which two Old Testament characters?

3 In Genesis ch.20, which couple pretended to be brother and sister rather than husband and wife?

4 In Genesis ch.43, who was the youngest of Jacob's sons?

5 In Luke ch.4, Jesus healed the mother-in-law of which apostle?

6 In Genesis ch.5, whose son was told by God to build an ark?

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WORD SEARCH

Match these words with the correct image and crossword space.

BROOM
SWEET
CAP
SKULL
WITCH
POTION
SPIDER
GHOST
VAMPIRE
BAT
TOMB
OWL
PUMPKIN
CAULDRON

HALLOWEEN



Super Sparrows

By Elizabeth McArdle

House sparrows are known to have a very close association with humans. To us, they are familiar little birds and when we hear their somewhat tuneless chirping, it can give us a sense of companionship when we are out and about or working in the garden. Maybe this is because they have lived alongside humans for a very long time. When the first farmers began to settle in one place to cultivate crops, sparrows settled with them. Sparrows are granivores, which means their diet consists mostly of seeds and grains. However, some sparrows have embraced urban life and love feeding on leftovers, bird feeder delicacies and scraps from the tables of out-door cafes.

You will often see these highly gregarious little birds

hopping around on the ground foraging for food or in groups bathing together in puddles. Staying close together means greater protection. If a predator appears, an alarm call is given and they dash for cover in nearby vegetation. Roosting together is another form of protection and they gather in noisy flocks in a pre-roosting site prior to moving to their chosen sleeping quarters. Before settling down, there is more chirping and chattering and it can take some time for them to quieten down.

House sparrows are also known for their adaptability in choosing their nest sites and have been found to build their nests in many unusual places. These include traffic lights, helmets, boats and even in an old mop. Their more normal nest sites include cavities in buildings, under the eaves of houses and in ivy covered walls.

We know that God cares deeply for all His creatures, as the gospels tell us that not one sparrow falls to the ground without God the Father knowing about it. We can all rest assured of this loving care, as we go about our daily lives, just as sparrows do under the beloved, watchful eye of God. ●



Image: Shutterstock



1. What's the most negative month of the year?
2. Why did a scarecrow win the Nobel prize?
3. When is an orange not an orange?
4. What is the cutest season of the year?
5. Why did the Granny Smith apple cry?
6. What did one autumn leaf say to the other?

1. NO-venber.
2. He was outstaring in his field.
3. When it's a pumpkin.
4. Awwwwturn.
5. Its peelings were hurt.
6. I'm falling for you.

COMPETITION WINNERS JULY / AUGUST 2025

Theo
Adams
Guildford

Rose
Moore
Wilts

Emma
Fitzsimmons
Middlesex

Phoebe
Pluckwell
Lincoln

1

2

1

2

Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under

Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over

NOVEMBER PRAYERS

For Those Who Journeyed With Us

Sr Lucia Park Jong

Fr Peter Hughes

Sr Breda Noonan

Fr Noel O'Neil

We remember Columban missionaries and benefactors, their families and friends, who have died during the past year, and give thanks to God for their lives and service.



Scan the QR code to tell us the names of your departed loved ones.

Names will be placed before the altar in the chapel of St Columban in Solihull for special remembrance in daily Mass and prayers during November.

May they rest in peace.

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