

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

DECEMBER 2025



"A SPIRITUAL GRANDPA"

70 Years
a Priest

JOSEPH'S CHRISTMAS

Caring for Mary and Jesus

THE PRAYER TRUST

Seven Million
Miracle

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THE FAR EAST

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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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“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”

Luke 2:6-7

Fr Jason Antiquera is a Filipino Columban missionary artist working in Korea. Through his art ministry he shares Gospel joy and helps people to connect with God. Here he shares some insights into the Nativity as depicted in his painting of the first Christmas on this issue's cover.

This painting of the birth of Jesus originated as a black-and-white digital artwork created on an iPhone. The digital piece became a reference for a larger canvas painting.

The painting features the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—set against a starry night backdrop. Mary is portrayed lying on her back, physically weak and exhausted after giving birth, emphasising her humanity and the realities of motherhood. Cradling her newborn, she entrusts the baby to Joseph, who warmly and openly embraces the child.

In this portrayal, I highlight Joseph not just as provider and protector, but as a nurturing, compassionate father—diverging from the typical stoic depictions in religious art. His affectionate gesture expresses quiet acceptance and deep love, embracing his role as father despite knowing Jesus is not his biological son.

In this reimagined portrayal of the

Nativity I invite viewers to reflect not only on the divine but also on the deeply human aspects of the Holy Family, celebrating the tenderness, love, shared wonder and the extraordinary roles each member of the Holy Family played in this sacred moment.

The bluish night sky draws inspiration from Van Gogh's luminous palette, capturing the depth and wonder of the moment.

Unlike traditional depictions of the Nativity, which feature a single, prominent Christmas star, this sky is filled with constellations. Among them is a particularly bright and spectacular star with a tail streaking across the heavens, resembling a comet—an interpretation inspired by Giotto's 'Adoration of the Magi' and the longstanding idea of the Star of Bethlehem as a celestial marvel.

The vibrant night sky enhances the sense of awe, marking the miraculous birth of the Saviour in a way that feels both celestial and grounded in human experience. ●

Wishing all our readers, families and supporters a very happy and peaceful Christmas!





01



02

knows Fr Barry personally can testify, and as countless readers of the **Far East** magazine can verify from the numerous articles he has written over the years, he maintains a deep curiosity about everything Japanese. Moreover, thanks to his inquisitive mind, not only does Japan remain a source of fascination for him, but so also does the gospel message as he continually seeks fresh insights from his prayer, reading and reflection on Jesus' life, teaching and ministry.

As a Columban seminarian in Japan in the early 1990s, I recall Fr Barry leading a retreat that

had as its theme, 'God chooses the weak'. During the course of that week, he not only encouraged us to pray with passages from the Bible which emphasised that limitations and weaknesses are blessings in disguise, but he also told us about how he had come to see God at work in his own struggles and suffering.

After his ordination, he felt less than enthusiastic about his assignment to Japan, since he had struggled with Latin in secondary school and was fearful that the Japanese language would be even more difficult. Over time, however, he did learn Japanese and came to feel at home in Japan. What a shock it was for him when, after eleven years of missionary activity, he was struck down with beriberi which necessitated a nine month stay in hospital, followed by a prolonged period of recuperation back home. It was a period not only of intense physical suffering, but also of emotional and spiritual anguish.

Only after a prolonged period of soul searching did he come to the realisation that God was telling him "my power is made perfect in weakness" and then he grasped what St Paul meant when he wrote, "that is why I delight in weaknesses... hardships... difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor, 12:9-12).

After his recovery, Fr Barry was assigned to the Columban seminary in Sydney for thirteen years. While he enjoyed the stimulation of engaging with young people's questions and concerns, as

"A SPIRITUAL GRANDPA"

Fr Tim Mulroy pays tribute to Columban Missionary Fr Barry Cairns who celebrates 70 years of priesthood this month.

Every year, Fr Barry Cairns has a few reasons to celebrate during the month of December. On the 4th of the month, he celebrates his birthday - this year his 94th. Then, on the evening of the 24th, he celebrates the birth of Jesus with his parishioners - in recent years with the community of Shin-Koyasu church where he continues his ministry. However, between these two major celebrations is a third - Fr Barry's ordination anniversary, and this year he will celebrate 70 years of Columban missionary priesthood on the 18th of December.

A native of Lower Hutt, New Zealand, Barry joined the Columban seminary after high school. Seven years later, plus a 31-day journey by sea from Australia to Japan, he began his missionary adventures - which continue up to this day! As everyone who

01. 94-year-old Columban Missionary Fr Barry Cairns tends his garden in the Diocese of Yokohama. All photos: courtesy Fr Barry Cairns.

02. Fr Barry in the early years of his ministry in Japan.

03. 'Santa' visits some of the younger members of the community of Shin-Koyasu church.

04. Welcoming new members to the parish following their baptism.

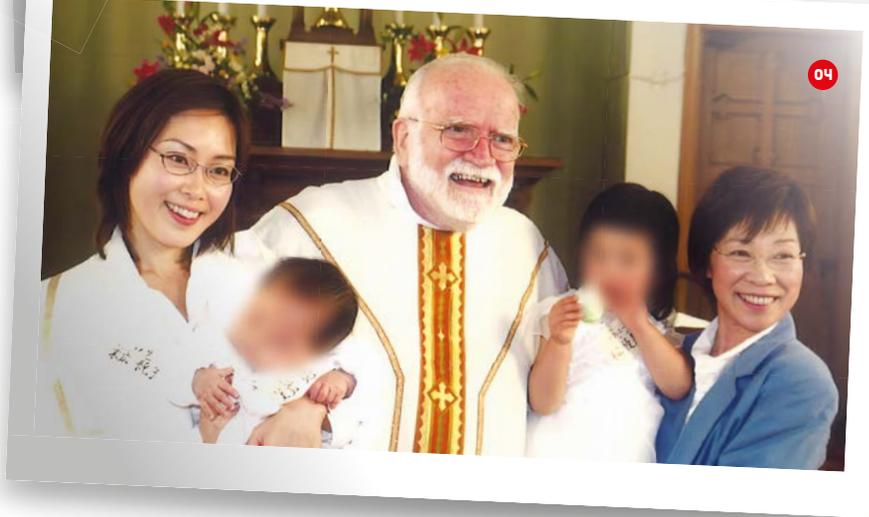
each year passed his dream of returning to mission in Japan seemed to become more remote. However, to his surprise and delight, after a sixteen-year gap, he was re-assigned to Japan, even though he then had to deal with the many challenges that such a major transition entailed.

Back in Japan, Fr Barry came to the realisation that his experience of the Columban seminary in Australia had equipped him to support seminarians and young priests in his mission. Therefore, he arranged with the local seminary in Japan for a seminarian to stay in his rectory and join in various parish activities every weekend throughout the academic year. Fr Takeshi Miyauchi was one of those seminarians who came to know Fr Barry and experience parish life alongside him in Hodogaya church during weekends from 2006 to 2008.

Almost twenty years later, he continues to value that experience and relationship. On the occasion of Fr Barry's 70th anniversary of priesthood, he writes, "Recently, I have been visiting Shin-Koyasu church once a month, spending time with Fr Barry. It's rather embarrassing to admit, but initially I thought I was visiting for his sake. However, as the visits continued, I came to realise that these visits were less for his sake and more for my own. Seeing his radiant face and receiving his words filled with compassion, encouragement and gentleness has become a tremendous source of support for me. He's like a spiritual grandpa to me."

This December, as Fr Barry responds to the good wishes of so many people who, like Fr Miyauchi, have experienced God's guidance, kindness and care through his ministry during these past 70 years, he will have no hesitation in drawing on these words of St Paul: "To God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory..." (Eph. 3:20-21). Yes, the 70th anniversary of his ordination, his 94th birthday, and Christmas, are three great reasons for Fr Barry to celebrate God's astounding generosity during the month of December this year. ●

Originally from Meelick, Swinford, Co Mayo, Fr Tim Mulroy was Regional Director in the US between 2012-2018. He previously worked in parish ministry in Japan and in El Paso, Texas. A former Columban Superior General he is now based in Britain.



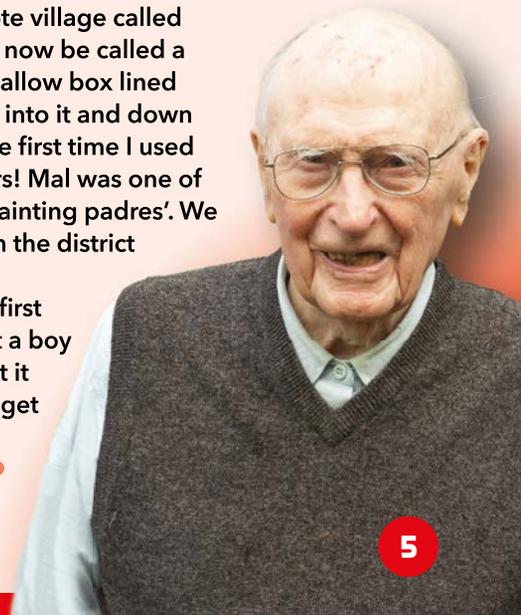
FR BARRY PAYS TRIBUTE TO FR MALACHY HANRATTY

Fr Malachy and I celebrate 70 years of priesthood this year; we were also classmates in Japanese language school in preparation for mission in Japan. Malachy is also my friend. I stayed with his mother, sisters and brother in Armagh and I still wear the lovely Aran jumper they gave me.

Mal was coordinator for the Lay Missionaries in Japan. His apostolate in Japan was teaching people to pray. He helped through his publications 'Discoveries in Prayer', 'Praying with Scripture', 'Luke Helping Us to Listen in Prayer' and 'Resurrection Gifts'. (All available on the website www.columban.ie)

In 1964 he was pastor of a remote village called Ryujin. There he made what would now be called a solar panel. On his roof he put a shallow box lined with aluminium foil. Water was fed into it and down to the shower below via a hose. The first time I used it I burned the skin off my shoulders! Mal was one of the group of six of us called 'The painting padres'. We painted the roofs of our rectories in the district of Wakayama.

In 1957 Mal helped me with my first article for the *Far East*. It was about a boy whose pet goldfish was sick. He put it into the church's holy water font to get better! The article was reprinted in 'Ireland's Own' magazine, I think! ●





PILGRIMS OF HOPE

- BUILDERS OF LOVE -

Columban Lay Missionary, Nathalie Marytsch, writes about the Hope Garden in Birmingham which provides a sanctuary for those marginalised due to ethnicity, disability or social status.

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There is something about doors. They come in all shapes and sizes, different colours and quality. However, they all have the same functionality: of opening or closing off access to a space. I am thinking of a particular door: the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica. A Door that Pope Francis opened to mark the beginning of a Jubilee Year for Catholics which he themed, 'Pilgrims of Hope'. The significance of crossing that threshold serves as a reminder that everyone is invited to become a pilgrim on this journey towards God's kingdom.

At Hope Garden, there is also a door. This door opens not into a grand basilica, but into a small walled garden, a sanctuary

in a deprived community of inner-city Birmingham. Once a week, it welcomes the members involved in the project. Initially, the project was set up to help break down barriers of division in the community, after one asylum seeker woman was spat at by a neighbour. From there, the project evolved into a safe space where people from the community who felt marginalised by the rest of society due to ethnicity, disability, or social status could come, have a cup of tea, chat, grow vegetables together, and experience the love of God in action.

The members of Hope Garden are a true representation of how diverse Birmingham city is. They are from faraway places in Africa, Asia, South America, and also from within Britain. However, what people share in common is their migratory experience. Most of them have crossed geographical boundaries in search of sanctuary, hoping to rebuild their lives in a safe environment. I call them Pilgrims of Hope, too.

A few weeks ago, the Hope Garden door opened once again on a Thursday afternoon. Our task that week was a crafter's task: to make baskets for our plants using nature's resources and recycled materials.

We wandered around the neighbourhood and gathered some fallen sticks from the trees. We then selected the ones that looked similar in size and shape and began the process of assembling them together. We followed the 'seemingly' easy instructions on a YouTube video. As always, it was easier said than done!

Yet, the process of making the baskets - aside from being a time filled with giggles, jokes and occasional frustration - was a wonderful moment of people coming together, working for a common purpose. In that simple act of building something with our hands, the deeper symbolism of the Holy Door echoed quietly inside me: the crossing of thresholds, the coming together of pilgrims, the hope of something new. "We did it!" one of the members exclaimed. And indeed, we had.

Several weeks have passed since our basket-making session. Now, we walk into the garden to check on the progress of our plants, hoping that the slugs have not eaten them, and testing our craft skills to see whether our baskets are not only environmentally friendly but also



weatherproof.

As we continue the journey, we hope and pray that the fruits of our labour will be more than strawberries: they will be signs of healing and community-building. And just as the Holy Door invites pilgrims to cross into something sacred, may our own humble garden door continue to open wide to welcome everyone, *todos, tutti*, as Pope Francis famously said. ●

Nathalie Marytsch is a Columban Lay Missionary from Chile. She and her husband Mauricio run Fatima House in Birmingham which offers sanctuary to vulnerable women seeking refuge. She is coordinator of the Invitation to Mission programme in Britain.

01. Nathalie Marytsch and members of the Hope Garden project meet once a week to immerse themselves in a nature project aimed at breaking down barriers of division in the community.
02. The door that opens into Hope Garden, a small walled sanctuary in a deprived community of inner-city Birmingham.
03. The finished work! A basket for plants made from nature's resources and recycled materials
04. Strawberries flourish in the project's basket.



SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION 2026

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

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COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES
 BRITAIN



A CHRISTMAS DAY TO REMEMBER



Last Christmas Columban Missionary Fr John McEvoy was invited to celebrate Mass in the ruins of Killoughey's old church and cemetery where 373 years previously 100 people were brutally killed as they attended Christmas Day Mass.

01. Faith of our Fathers: In the shadow of the Slieve Bloom mountains local people gathered on Christmas morning to celebrate Mass and remember the 'Killoughey Martyrs'.

02. The ruins of the old Killoughey Church

03. Columban Missionary Fr John McEvoy was the celebrant at Mass marking the Nativity and the remembering the 100 people killed by Cromwell's forces as they attended Mass on Christmas Day in 1651.

04. Fr John McEvoy with the Committee who organised the Mass, Breda Condrón and her family, and local historian Mattie Mooney in the middle.

All images courtesy of the Tullamore Tribune and Odran Condrón.

It was a strange invitation. At the time I thought it unreasonable and even not possible! Would I consider offering Mass on Christmas morning in a ruined church in the old Killoughey graveyard to remember the 100 or more people who were burned to death there by Cromwellian Soldiers as they attended Mass on Christmas Morning in 1651?

This ruined church and graveyard can be found nestled in the heart of the countryside looking out across the Slieve Bloom mountains near the village of Mountbollus, in Co Offaly. In her book, **Remembering the Past - A History of Killoughey Church and Cemetery**, Breda Condrón recorded what happened in this picturesque spot under the foothills of the Slieve Blooms on Christmas day 1651.

On that fateful morning as parishioners attended Mass to celebrate the Birth of Christ, Cromwellian soldiers surrounded the Church, secured the doors and set fire to the thatched roof. The priest and congregation were burned to death. This was the follow-up to the persecution of Catholics by Oliver Cromwell, who was Lord Protector of England, and made attendance at Mass illegal. Anyone attending Mass risked their lives.

The church was never rebuilt, and it has been in ruins ever since. In 1985 a local committee was set up to clean and restore the foundations of the church and to record the names on the old headstones. During the clean-up and excavation of the ruins, many bone fragments, horseshoes, burned timber and latches were discovered inside the church, evidence of the terrible event. This good work by the Committee was recognised with an award from the National Heritage Council.

A few Masses were celebrated around that time but never on Christmas Day. Members of the Committee, mainly members of Breda Condrón's family invited me to celebrate Mass on Christmas morning 2024 and I was willing to oblige, provided the weather permitted. The hope was that about 30 people would attend.

The morning was one of the mildest Christmas mornings on record. Some 300 people, ranging in age from 5 to 91 years, flocked into the cemetery and the ruins of the old Killoughey Church for that first Christmas Mass to be celebrated there in 373 years in memory of those who perished on that fateful morning in 1651. It was a moving, emotional and spiritual occasion appreciated by all who attended.



Everyone was delighted to be there not only to remember those who died in Killoughey church for their faith but also to reflect on the cruelty and suffering of Irish Catholics throughout history, especially during those terrible years of the Cromwellian invasion and its aftermath. A sad time in Irish history.

The Mass was not widely advertised except by word of mouth. But the local people of Kilcormac/Killoughey/ Mountbollus/Blueball gathered in numbers to remember and honour their ancestors, locally known as the 'Killoughey Martyrs'.

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

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After Mass everyone chatted among themselves. Even on this Christmas morning, no one seemed to be in a hurry to depart. A Christmas Day with a difference and one that will remain in the memory of those who attended for many years to come.

03



04



A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

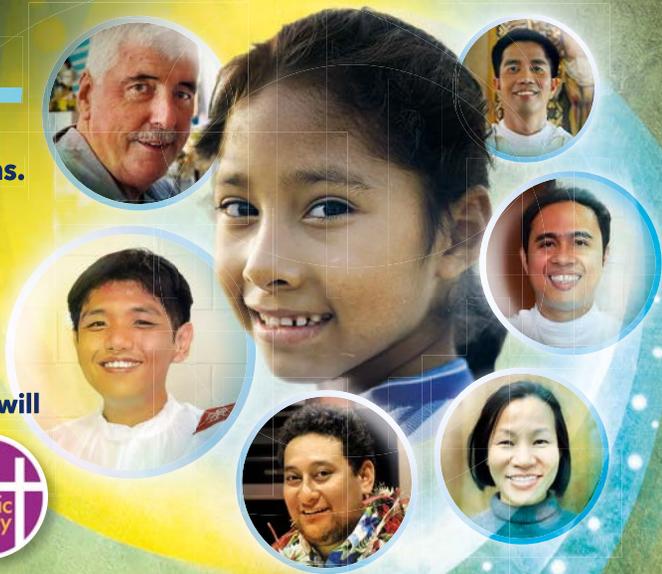
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Christmas is Coming!

Jesus is Born!

01

As we contemplate the Christmas miracle, Fr John Boles invites us to learn about a Columban miracle - the Prayer Trust - which has published an astonishing seven million booklets and is marking its silver jubilee this year.

THE SEVEN MILLION MIRACLE

The Prayer Trust is one of the most enduring - and endearing - features of Columban mission ever to come out of Britain. For a quarter of a century its prolific output of publications - over 150 titles to date - have brought consolation, inspiration and enrichment to thousands. Translated into various languages, booklets have appeared in Britain, France, Ireland, Australia, the US and as far afield as China and India. They have touched the lives of young and old parishioners, patients, pilgrims and prisoners, people in all walks of life and in all situations. Altogether, it is estimated that the number of individual copies produced has surpassed the seven million mark. Yet the whole enterprise had very humble beginnings.

Time has flown for Carol Beck, the Prayer Trust's Co-Founder, who has been there from the start. "Twenty-five years and it seems only like yesterday since we started," she smiles. Born in Yorkshire, by the early 1990s Carol was settled with her family in the quiet West Midlands village of Balsall Common, close to the Columban Central House in Solihull. Her local parish had a somewhat unusual patron, Blessed Robert

Grissold - the only church in the country to bear that name.

Robert Grissold had been a Catholic layman from the area who, during Reformation times, had joined with a Fr John Sugar in secretly keeping the Faith alive. They proved to be an effective underground team, and Robert stuck with Fr John through thick and thin. Maintaining the tradition of Robert Grissold, Carol was soon to find herself as a lay volunteer who teams up with a Catholic priest in a missionary enterprise and stays with it through all the resultant 'ups and downs'.

Columban Fr Pat Sayles had returned home to England after having done parish work in Peru and served as **Far East** editor in Ireland. He had got involved in home visiting but quickly realised there was a limit to the number of homes he could reach on his own and so hit on the idea of producing little prayer pamphlets. He recalls the moment it occurred to him that, if one person "had a little prayer book and could hand it to a neighbour and so on, it would be a wonderful way to spread the Gospel". It would jump-start a kind of "spiritual multiplier".

Fr Pat knew he would need help with the project and thought of Carol, whom he'd come to know while serving as a supply priest in her parish. The way her three altar-boy sons, "trooped to the altar one after another to serve Mass" had brought a smile to his face. For her part, Carol immediately took to the style and content of Pat's early booklets. "They were simple, straightforward, with no jargon", she explains. "They could mean a lot to people going through all sorts of problems: bereavement, illness - even cancer." She had read a book Pat had written for his 25th ordination anniversary in 1998 - 'Lord, Inflame our Hearts with your Spirit' and felt that "for the first time, I realised who the Holy Spirit was". She began helping Fr Pat prepare his booklets and accompanying cassettes (the peak of technology at the time).

Pat saw he needed a base. In 1999 he took on a nearby parish in the delightfully named hamlet of Wootton Wawen and began publishing in earnest. Carol drove over every day. In 2000 they decided to organise themselves as a formal charity, choosing as a name 'The Prayer Trust', influenced by Pat's membership of 'The National Trust', which administers sites of historic and scenic interest in England and Wales.



02

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. Christmas booklets.

02. Columban Fr Pat Sayles who co-founded The Prayer Trust with Carol Beck 25 years ago. The charity has published over seven million booklets on a range of themes and topics.

03. Collage of covers of the Prayer Trust's booklets.

The scheme thrived from the outset. The idea was to distribute one booklet and, with the returns from it, publish the next, and build the project up accordingly. "In the first year we sold 125,000 booklets", remembers Pat. Demand soared. Some 20 friends volunteered to help. Three containers were brought in to store the material. Bookmarks and the occasional full-length book were added to their portfolio. Soon they were not just delivering to homes and parishes but to schools, prisons and hospitals. They diversified the range of topics and devised themes for children, Christmas and Easter, First Communion, Harvest Festival and so on.

So far, Carol and Pat were mirroring the success of the 17th century lay/priest team of Robert Grissold and Fr John Sugar. Unfortunately, Robert and Fr John met with disaster in 1603 when they were caught by Crown forces as they were returning from celebrating a clandestine Mass. They were taken as prisoners to Warwick, where they were tried and condemned to death. Similarly, the team of Carol and Fr Pat were to undergo a trial, albeit of a more

prosaic 21st century type. In 2008 they were coming back from Worcester after taking photographs for a new booklet when an out-of-control vehicle hit them head-on. Both were injured and hospitalised. They could have died.

Blessed Robert Grissold and St John Sugar were executed in 1604. However, Carol Beck and Fr Pat Sayles survived and recovered. It seemed like a miracle. It was only later that they realised how great a miracle it had been, when they suddenly recalled that the 'great escape' had occurred on 17th July - the Feast of Blessed Robert Grissold! They returned to work and The Prayer Trust continued to grow. In 2016 it moved premises, taking over part of the office extension and old stable block at the Columban's Solihull house. It flourishes to this day, celebrating its Silver Jubilee with Carol and Pat still at the helm and those seven million copies under its belt. Carol and Pat even went on to complete the booklet they'd be preparing before the crash. Fittingly, it was called 'In Joyful Hope'. A miracle indeed. A seven million miracle. ● www.theprayertrust.org.uk



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COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES BRITAIN

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JOSEPH'S CHRISTMAS

Sr Mihwa Kim recalls a gathering at Christmastime for young people in a rural part of China in which the focus was St Joseph, the quiet and faithful man entrusted with the care of Mary and her child, Jesus.

Two years ago, I had the privilege of participating in a Christmas Youth gathering held in a rural area of China. This intimate gathering brought together twelve young participants, each eager to experience the joy and spirit of Christmas in their own unique way. During this event, I was invited to give a short talk on preparing for Christmas. For my message, I chose to share the story of "Joseph's Christmas."

Why Joseph's Christmas?

In the Bible, Joseph's role in the birth of Jesus is mentioned briefly. Joseph, the quiet and faithful man entrusted with the care of Mary and her child, is a figure of immense dedication and humility. Yet, his story often receives less attention compared to Mary or the shepherds. It was this sense of quiet faithfulness that I sought to highlight in my talk. Through

my reflection on Joseph, I hoped to encourage the youth to look beyond the surface of Scripture and use their imaginations to fill in the gaps. By doing so, they could better understand and learn from the profound commitment Joseph demonstrated.

Despite the limited direct information in the Bible, we can imagine the challenges Joseph faced. As a young man accompanying Mary to Bethlehem, particularly with her so close to giving birth, his journey would have been uneasy - the long and demanding travel, the slow pace dictated by Mary's condition, and the frustration of finding "no room" in Bethlehem. In the end, they were given only a stable, a humble and bleak place to welcome the Saviour. Through it all, Joseph's role as guide, protector, and caretaker becomes undeniably clear.

His life was not marked by outstanding moments but by humble acts of quiet faithfulness. He did not complain or seek recognition for his sacrifices. Instead, he focused on ensuring Mary's safety and well-being, trusting God's plan even in the face of hardships.

By sharing the story of Joseph, I encouraged the youth to think about how they could apply this principle to their own lives. While they may not be faced with the same circumstances Joseph was, they too are on a journey – a journey of faith. It is a journey that requires imagination, trust, and a willingness to go beyond what is explicitly stated in the Bible. As young people, their natural curiosity and imagination are powerful tools they can use to deepen their relationship with God.

The main purpose of sharing Joseph's Christmas story was to inspire the youth to find different ways of connecting with their faith. Faith should not be confined to a single approach or understanding. Instead, it should be open to exploration, imagination, and personal reflection.

The participants were eager to share their thoughts and ideas. After my talk, the discussion among the group was lively and enriching. They asked thoughtful questions, offered insights, and related Joseph's quiet strength to their own lives.

For me, this experience was profoundly meaningful. It wasn't just an opportunity to speak - it was a chance to witness the beauty of faith in action. The young people's openness, imagination, and willingness to engage deeply with Scripture reminded me of the vitality of young believers and their capacity

to shape their spiritual journeys in meaningful ways.

My time at the Christmas Youth Gathering in a rural area of China was truly unforgettable. Sharing the story of Joseph's faith and dedication to God during the Nativity opened the door to deeper conversations about our own paths of faith. The enthusiasm of the young people and their insights reaffirmed for me the belief that faith is not simply a set of rules or teachings; it is a living, breathing journey that we undertake with imagination, trust, and a passion for Christ. ●

Columban Sr Mihwa Kim is from Korea. She served in China for several years and is now assigned to Myanmar.



02

03

01. The Nativity: St Joseph's life was not marked by outstanding moments but by humble acts of quiet faithfulness. He did not complain or seek recognition for his sacrifices.

Image: Shutterstock.

02. + 03. "My time at the Christmas Youth Gathering in a rural area of China was truly unforgettable. Sharing the story of Joseph's faith and dedication to God during the Nativity opened the door to deeper conversations about our own paths of faith."

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“Let us be Christ's, not our own”

– St Columban

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Missionary Sisters of St. Columban





02

probably due to Ili that John embraced the Catholic faith.

John Lindsey Chute was the great-great-great-grandfather of Vera, Lucy, Albert, Clara and Joe Chute from Fiji, all of whom, along with three of their children, took a trip to Britain and Ireland in late July 2025, to connect with any living relatives they could find, as well as searching for any gravestone or memory of William or any of his progeny. They also came to honour the memories of many Columban priests who ministered to their grandparents, parents and themselves in Fiji.

A series of extraordinary coincidences began almost immediately on their arrival at Dalgan Park and in particular during their visit to the genealogy section of the National Archives in Dublin. They prayed at the graves of Columbans Frs Dick O'Sullivan, John Doyle and Martin Dobey - all of whom served in the parish of Labasa in Fiji with their father Pat Chute often at their side. Fr Dick celebrated Pat and Rosie's wedding in 1965.

They then discovered that a Fr John (Jack) Chute was living in our nursing home in Dalgan. Although Fr Jack is from Tralee, the proximity of Counties Cork and Kerry, along with the relative rarity of the Chute/Tuite name, certainly points to some sort of family connection. The Chutes from Fiji sang a beautiful Pacific 'farewell song' to Fr Jack, in case this would be their only meeting, while Fr Jack, in turn, gave a lusty rendition of 'The Rose of Tralee'.

Half of the Chute siblings now live in Los Angeles/San Francisco, so they were also delighted to meet Columbans Frs TP Reynolds and Gerry O'Shaughnessy, both of whom served in St Hilary's Parish, Pico Rivera, California. The Chutes, along with other Peruvian, Korean and Filipinos migrant friends of the Columbans have for some years been involved in organising fundraising galas for the Society of St Columban. The Chute siblings and their families were very close friends of Serafina

IN SEARCH OF OUR ROOTS



Fr Pat Colgan recalls a recent visit of a Fijian family to Dalgan as part of their search for their Irish ancestors and how they "connected the circle" between Fiji and Ireland and the Chutes and the Columbans.

In 1800 in Dingle, County Kerry, a certain John Lindsey Chute was born. After studies for the Anglican ministry at Trinity College Dublin, he served in various Church of Ireland parishes in Counties Roscommon, Kerry and Cork. Biographies of the time refer to his "impressive preaching" and "good labours" during the Irish Famine of 1845-52. His wife, Jane Lucinda Burleigh, also of Dingle, gave birth to seven children, before she died at the age of 51. John then remarried and had six more children, before he died in 1871.

One of their sons, William, was born in 1837. After studies at Trinity College, he was sent to the warmer climes of the South Pacific. He ended up in the British colony of the Gilbert Islands (present-day Kiribati), where he married Ili Tekea. They had one son - John Chute - who migrated to the larger colony of Fiji. He had 15 children, eight with his Kiribati wife and seven with a woman in Fiji. The family believe that it was

- 01. 'Mission Accomplished' - the Chute family surrounding their great-great-great-grandfather John Lindsey Chute's grave in Co Cork. Photo: Fr Pat Colgan.
- 02. William Burleigh Chute, who was born in 1837.
- 03. The Chute family at grave of Columban Missionary Fr Dick O'Sullivan, who served in Fiji, along with Frs Pat Colgan and John McEvoy, who were missioned in Fiji but now live in Ireland.
- 04. A 'Chute reunion' with Columban Fr John (Jack) Chute at Dalgan Nursing Home. Photo: Fr Pat Colgan.

Ranadi, a Fijian Lay Missionary who sadly died in Los Angeles in 2012. They continue to support Columban Fr Diego Cabrera Rojas, the Administrator of St Hilary's Parish.

At the National Archives office in Dublin the genealogist was able to help them discover not just the birth, baptism and marriage records for Rev John Lindsey, but also those of many of his seven children, including William. They were also able to locate the gravestone of Rev John Lindsey in Co Cork and confirm the gravesite of his wife Jane Lucinda at the abandoned graveyard of St George's Church, Hardwicke Place, in Dublin.

The search was helped enormously by the fact that many of the Chute ancestors were Anglican clergy for whom records were kept, as well as by the Chute family's own exhaustive research ahead of their visit to Ireland. Tears flowed in the Archive office at the joy of the family "connecting the circle" and I felt privileged to witness it. I could never forget the scrumptious Irish roasts that Vera's granny, Letitia, would make all the Columban priests and students on Sundays in Suva. I also have happy memories of spending Christmases, and particularly New Year at the Chute's ancestral island of Nakula. It was truly great to witness the Chute family's determination to honour the country of their ancestors, as well as their love for both the Columbans and their Catholic faith. ●



03



04

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.

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GOOD NEWS FROM MYANMAR

It is not often we hear good news from Myanmar these days, but 2024 brought joyful news for the Columbans.



Deo Gratias!

Fr Nawi La Aung (Francis Xavier), the first Columban priest from Myanmar, was ordained at St Luke's Parish in Edin, Myitkyina, Kachin State.



Separately, in Manila, **Sr Sut Nan Bawk**, the first Columban Sister from Myanmar, made her First Profession.

15

PLANNING FOR CHRISTMAS

Fr Tim Mulroy recalls a conversation he had with an elderly missionary about his prayerful preparations for a quiet Christmas, each day remembering some of the people and places from his life's journey.



“How do you plan to celebrate Christmas?” I asked Fr Peter who, having spent more than fifty years on mission, was then in need of ongoing nursing care due to various age-related ailments. “I suppose I’ll celebrate it in the same quiet way as I have done these past several years. Growing up there were nine of us, now we’re down to three. My younger sister has dementia and my older brother has all kinds of health problems. And, as you can see, I’m just hanging in, so the best place for me to spend Christmas is here in my own room where I won’t be any trouble to anyone.”

“Since returning home from mission a few years ago, my world has become smaller and smaller. I had been away so long that I don’t know the younger generations back in my hometown. Besides, my mind and my memory are not nearly as sharp as they used to be. Then, when my eyesight declined, I had to give up driving. Now my balance is poor so I’m generally confined to this place. I seldom go out, and when I do, I don’t know anyone.”

Then, after a pause, Fr Peter continued with a mischievous smile, “Every year, I look forward to Christmas; for several weeks I make a grand tour around this country and across the world to meet my family and neighbours, as well as parishioners and friends from my missionary days. It’s a strange thing to say but I begin my preparations for Christmas at Halloween. During the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls we bring to mind the deceased, but I need more than two days to remember all those who crossed my path and have already gone home to God ... so throughout the month of

November I spend a few minutes each day recalling the names of four or five people who are deceased, and I jot down their names and say a little prayer for them, so that by the end of November I might have 150 or even 200 names on that list.”

“The truth is, at this stage of my life, I know a lot of people who have crossed over to the far shore - and those whom I know on this shore are becoming fewer and fewer! Anyway, it helps me to look back over my life, remember those that meant so much to me and are now on that far shore - maybe they can help me on the last leg of my journey so that I can cross over safely and join them.”

“At the start of Advent my focus changes from the deceased to the living. Each day I recall a few people to whom I write a Christmas card or make a phone call and as I jot down their names on my list I say a little prayer for each one of them and their family. I do the same after I open each Christmas card - I ask God to bless the sender and their loved ones with peace and joy during the Christmas season. Again, I have 150 or maybe 200 on that list, though many of the younger generations, including my great-grandnephews and nieces, I know only by name.”

“I try to keep the Christmas spirit alive until the Feast of the Epiphany. It helps that a few nephews and nieces drop by to visit me after they have celebrated Christmas with their own families. And then there are always a few Christmas cards that arrive after the New Year. I add them to my display of Christmas cards here in my room as they remind me not only of those who sent them, but also of places and events in my past life.”



“Even though I spend my days here in my bedroom, between the Feast of All Saints and the Feast of the Epiphany it feels as if my world expands as I recall each day some people and places from my life’s journey. I am grateful that I have lived in various places, met many people, and have had all kinds of experiences, both happy and sad. I have some regrets, but my overwhelming feeling is one of gratitude. When I pray with all those faded memories, I come to think that there is no such thing as near or far, no such thing as past or future, because everything and everyone is being held together in the heart of God - and that belief gives me great consolation and joy throughout the Christmas season.”

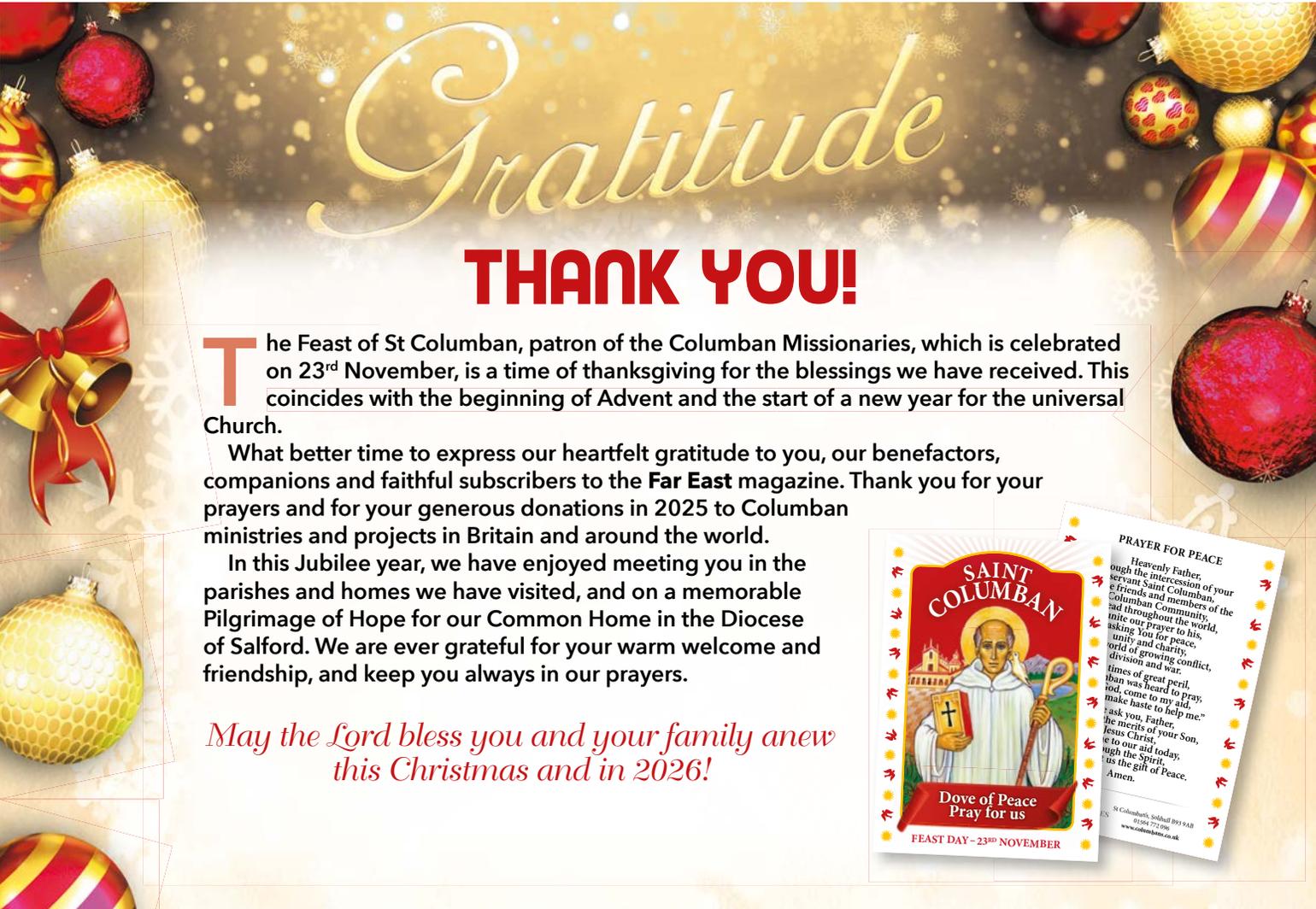
A few months after this conversation with Fr Peter, a sudden serious illness resulted in him crossing over to the far shore. There, he no longer dimly recalls people and places, but rather sees face to face all those whom he had encountered in various locations along the path of life; there he no longer has just a partial grasp of all the twists and turns on his life’s journey, but rather sees and appreciates how God guided and cared for him at every stage of the road. What a delightful homecoming! And what a joyous Christmas season Fr Peter must now be experiencing not just between the Feast of All Saints and the Feast of the Epiphany, but all year round! ●

Fr Tim Mulroy was ordained in 1995. A former primary school teacher from Co Mayo, he was Regional Director in the US between 2012-2018 and Superior General between 2018-2024. He is now based in Britain.

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Images: Shutterstock



Gratitude

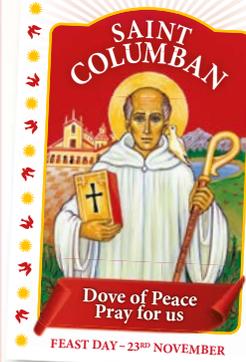
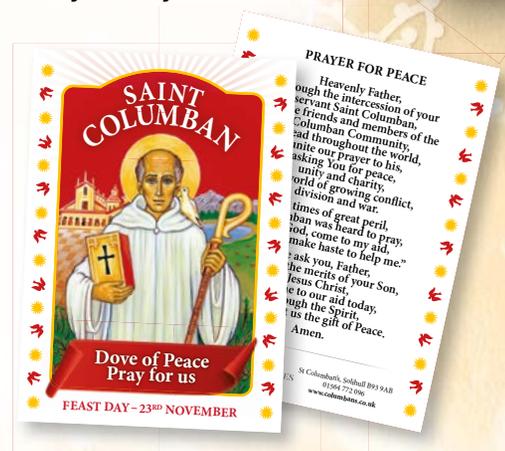
THANK YOU!

The Feast of St Columban, patron of the Columban Missionaries, which is celebrated on 23rd November, is a time of thanksgiving for the blessings we have received. This coincides with the beginning of Advent and the start of a new year for the universal Church.

What better time to express our heartfelt gratitude to you, our benefactors, companions and faithful subscribers to the **Far East** magazine. Thank you for your prayers and for your generous donations in 2025 to Columban ministries and projects in Britain and around the world.

In this Jubilee year, we have enjoyed meeting you in the parishes and homes we have visited, and on a memorable Pilgrimage of Hope for our Common Home in the Diocese of Salford. We are ever grateful for your warm welcome and friendship, and keep you always in our prayers.

May the Lord bless you and your family anew this Christmas and in 2026!



PRAYER FOR PEACE
 Heavenly Father,
 through the intercession of your
 servant Saint Columban,
 Columban Community,
 and members of the
 world, throughout the world,
 unite our prayer to his,
 asking You for peace,
 unity and charity,
 world of growing conflict,
 division and war,
 times of great peril,
 Columban was heard to pray,
 "Come to my aid,
 make haste to help me."
 Ask you, Father,
 the merits of your Son,
 Jesus Christ,
 to our aid today,
 through the Spirit,
 give us the gift of Peace.
 Amen.

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FEAST DAY - 23RD NOVEMBER



CHRISTMAS AT HOME

Christmas is a special time for family. Columban Lay Missionary Naanise Mo'unga recalls her holiday last Christmas at home in Tonga with her family and the joy of spending time together.

Naanise Mo'unga is from Tonga. She has served as a Columban Lay Missionary in the Philippines and in Fiji.

01. Naanise Mo'unga with her parents and family in Tonga.

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I was living and working in Fiji as a Columban lay missionary when I got the opportunity to return home to Tonga for Christmas to spend time with my elderly parents and with my siblings. Christmas Day created cherished memories while ensuring my parents felt loved and cared for in the comfort of my youngest brother's home.

A familiar energy hummed at the place, a symphony of creaking floorboards and laughter echoing in the air. It was my first Christmas vacation when all nine siblings, now scattered across the country, except for one of my sisters who is in New Zealand, descended upon our brother's house.

Mum and Dad, their hair a little whiter and their steps a bit slower, were the anchors of this chaotic, loving gathering. We kicked off with a family lunch on Christmas Day. We sang, danced and teased one another. My parents laughed until they cried, their joy infectious.

My siblings and I worked together in the kitchen, preparing our parents' favourite meals. The aroma of homemade *umu* from the underground oven, and the roasted pork filled the compound, and we all gathered around the dining table, sharing

laughter and stories. My Mum lit up as she recounted the funny mishaps from our childhood, and my Dad chimed in with his anecdotes, bringing back a wave of nostalgia.

This time with my family was not just a break from routine: it was a beautiful reminder of the importance of family, connection, and the joy of spending time together in peace and harmony. I realised how much this time meant to all of us. It wasn't merely about the activities we participated in; it was about the bond we strengthened as a family.

My parents felt cherished, and we all departed with our hearts full of love and wonderful memories, eagerly anticipating our next family gathering. The time together brought us closer and reminded us of the simple joys in life. Thanks to various apps I can stay connected with our far-flung family no matter where I am on mission. Spending time with my family and friends is emotionally refreshing and supports me in many ways. These connections give me a sense of belonging and encouragement and we make sure to pray for each other no matter where we are. ●



LOOKING BACK IN GRATITUDE

As we move towards the end of yet another year, it is good to take time to look back. This past year in Ireland brought me the precious gift of spending time with our Sisters there. When visiting them, I often came in a rush and stayed only a short while but each visit was filled with grace and meaning. They welcomed me so warmly into lives that have been shaped by joyful hospitality, by prayer and by a love that continues to give, even in silence.

This is a time of many changes for all of us throughout the world. I watched as some of our Sisters in the Nursing Home were transferred and others prepared to move to new places. There is a tender sorrow of saying goodbye to familiar rooms and long friendships. These are not easy paths to walk. Yet what I saw in our Sisters was not fear, but faith, not resistance, but trust, not an end, but a deep and steady yes to the journey still unfolding. Their lives have been a witness, as missionaries, to what it means to follow Christ, fully, freely, and continuously. And even now, they are still saying yes to Him in every step they take forward. That courage continues to touch me deeply.

William Bridges wrote that change is moving

house, but transition is taking the heart so as to feel at home. And we feel at home in each other's hearts, not in a place. In the Sisters, I saw this truth lived. They showed me that it is not the place, but the heart that makes a home and that when the heart rests in God, no change can take away what truly matters.

As I prepare to move into another chapter of my own journey, I want to carry this spirit with me. I want to respond to God with the same faithfulness and peace that I saw in our Sisters in the past year. I want to walk into the unknown, trusting that my heart will find its home when it remains anchored in Him.

I will continue to be grateful to the Sisters, for their prayers, their kindness, their quiet joy and their enduring yes to God. They will continue to inspire me more than words can say and I will carry their witness with me always and wherever I will be. They have gifted me with the courage and hope that we all need as we prepare to step into another year and all that it will offer us. ●

Sr Mihwa Kim

01. Centenary Mass for Columban Sisters in Co Wicklow, Ireland in 2024.

REST in PEACE



Sr Margaret (Cecilia) Burke



Fr James Joseph (Seamus) O'Neill

Sr Margaret (Cecilia) Burke was born in Clonberne, Co Galway in November 1941. After her Leaving she worked as an Assistant Teacher and then entered the Missionary Sisters of St Columban in Magheramore in 1961. She professed First Vows in 1964 after which she gained a Montessori Diploma from Sion Hill, Dublin. After Final Vows in 1969 she was assigned to the Philippines where she worked until 1978. In De Paul University, Chicago, Margaret gained a BEd, after which she returned to the Philippines to serve for a further twelve years. With this training and her expertise in Montessori education, Margaret set up a school to reach out to children in an economically depressed area of Metro Manila. She was known for her understanding of the challenges facing the poor and particularly children. Returning to Ireland, Margaret served as Area Treasurer and in pastoral ministry in St Agnes' parish in Crumlin. She took on the role as the Congregation's Liaison Person with the Irish Missionary Resource Service and with Misean Cara, and secured funding support for several ministries overseas. Margaret was assigned to Magheramore where she was Sacristan in the community for several years. Here, she was able to use her gifts in flower arrangement. Her meticulous attention to detail and artistic touch ensured all community celebrations were prepared to a very high standard. Just as she had handed over her responsibilities as community sacristan, Margaret became ill. Surrounded by many members of her family and the Sisters, she died peacefully in Magheramore on 12th August 2025.

Fr James Joseph (Seamus) O'Neill was born on 2nd October 1932 in Dungiven, Co Derry. He was educated at Cashel NS, Dungiven, and St Columb's College, Derry. He came to Dalgan in September 1950 and was ordained priest on 21st December 1956. He was appointed to graduate studies at St Xavier University, Antigonish, Canada 1957-1959, and in 1959 to the Philippines where he would spend most of the following 25 years on the island of Mindanao. After language studies he worked briefly in Bonifacio, and in Gingoog 1961-64. After a year in Talisayan, he spent four years in San Pablo. Three years in Pagadian followed and a year in Dimitaling, before he spent time in Camiguin. He had a year's renewal studies in Maynooth University, Ireland before going to the new Columban area in the Diocese of Tandag, Surigao del Sur, Mindanao. Seamus was a member of the first group appointed to a new mission in Belize in 1986; he ministered there for the following ten years. The people of Belize are a mixture of Creoles, descendants of slaves and slave-masters, Hispanics and peoples of mixed Caribbean, Indian and African ancestry. A key Columban contribution was training local lay leaders, to be a voice for the poor, and prepare candidates for the sacraments. On his return to Ireland, Seamus worked for five years in Balinaheglish in Elphin Diocese, before retiring to Ballinascreen, Co Derry where he helped in the parish. Seamus passed away peacefully on 18th August 2025. He was a gentle presence, a fisherman, an amateur pilot, and a quiet industrious missionary.

May they rest in peace.

PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

Published in 2023 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood, Fr Pat Sayles has selected prayers and photographs lovingly dedicated to all who share the good news of God's love for all. This hardback book is an ideal gift for Christmas.



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WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

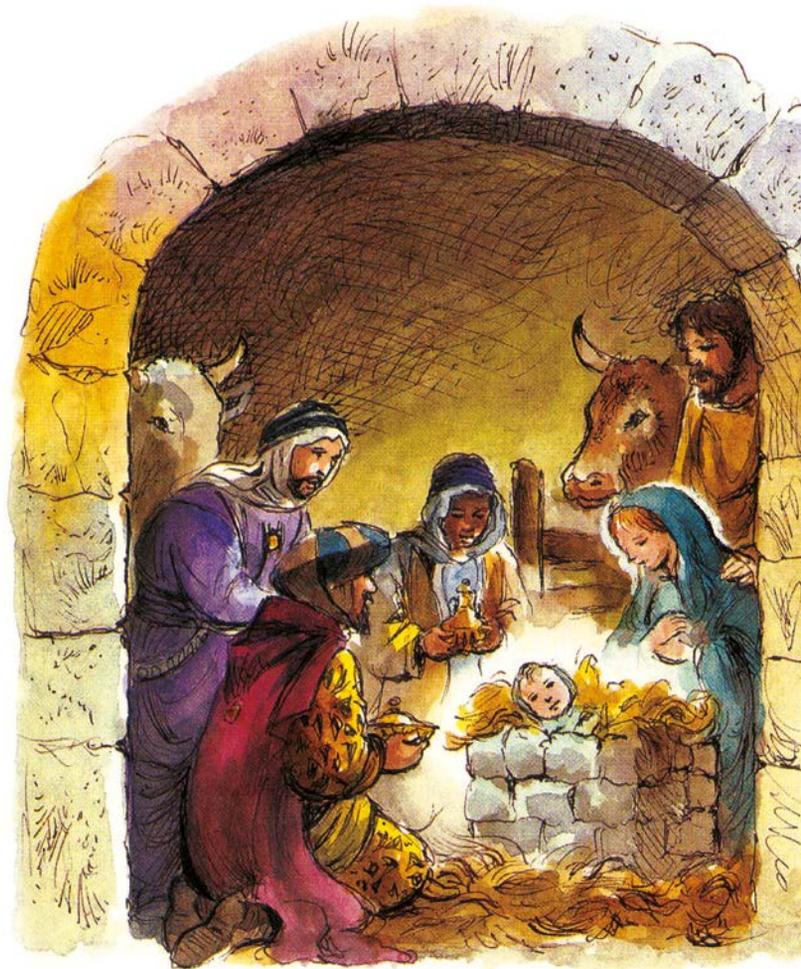


Illustration by Val Biro from One Hundred Bible Stories for Children. Published by Award Publications Ltd.

After Jesus was born, three wise men came to Jerusalem from the East, guided by a star. They were looking for the promised Messiah. As soon as they had seen the brilliant new star in the sky, they knew that this was the sign they had been waiting for.

“Where is the infant king of the Jews?” they asked everyone. “We have come to worship him. We have followed his star and have gifts for him.”

When King Herod heard of the strangers looking for a king, he sent for them and listened to their story, pretending to be as deeply religious as they were and carefully concealing his anger and fear.

“Go to Bethlehem,” he told them, “and when you have found the child come and let me know, so that I may go and pay him homage too.”

As the wise men left Jerusalem, the star they had seen appeared before them and led them to Bethlehem, to where Jesus and his parents were staying. They knew they had found the one they were looking for.

They knelt down in front of Jesus and gave him their gifts: gold for a king, frankincense for the worship of God, and myrrh, an oil used when burying the dead.

Afterwards, they returned home a different way.

They had been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, as he only wanted to kill Jesus.

It was the wise men who brought the good news of the Saviour to the world beyond Palestine. ●

Read also: Matthew 2:1-12

BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER 124

- 1 In Genesis ch.25, who was born first Esau or Jacob?

- 2 In John ch.11, who was the sister of Jesus’ friends Lazarus and Mary?

- 3 In 1 Samuel ch.14, who was King Saul’s father-in-law?

- 4 In Exodus ch.2, what was the occupation of Moses’ father-in-law?

- 5 In 2 Samuel ch.12, who was the mother of King Solomon?

- 6 In 2 Samuel ch.12, who rebuked King David when he killed Uriah in order to take his wife?

£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!
Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N°124, St Columban’s, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 31st December 2025.

Bible Quiz N° 122 Winners: Maddison Dunning, Coventry • Mary Doran, Newcastle-on-Tyne • Stephen Shaw, Cumbria.

Name: _____

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Colour the drawing and send it with your name and address to: COLPAINT, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 31st December 2025.

Name:

Age:

FOUR PRIZES TO BE WON!

Address:

WORD SEARCH

Find these words in the puzzle. They can be found across, backwards, up or down:

- POINSETTIA
- STOCKING
- FIREWORK
- ORNAMENTS
- STARS
- TREE
- LIGHTS
- COCOA
- GINGERBREAD
- HOLLY

Winter

B	T	P	O	A	D	H	O	L	L	Y	V
L	R	W	O	D	W	S	V	P	H	U	A
S	E	T	R	A	R	P	T	S	F	I	I
T	E	M	N	E	K	E	O	R	C	C	T
H	G	V	A	R	R	G	P	A	F	Z	T
G	N	J	M	B	O	J	M	T	O	F	E
I	I	F	E	R	W	Z	L	S	J	S	S
L	K	K	N	E	E	A	J	M	G	P	N
N	C	K	T	G	R	M	R	N	T	F	I
H	O	Z	S	N	I	X	S	W	S	M	O
U	T	H	O	I	F	C	O	C	O	A	P
W	S	M	W	G	L	U	I	A	P	R	Z



Image: Shutterstock



The Snow Bunting

By Elizabeth McArdle



In winter, if you are walking along a quiet beach in a howling gale, you might just be fortunate enough to send up a flurry of snowflakes. Snowflakes are another name for snow buntings and the sight of these beautiful little birds has the power to brighten up these cold and dark winter days.

They are birds of extremes, breeding in the spring tucked between rocky crevices in the high Arctic where their snow white plumage blends beautifully with the snowy landscape. Spring in the high Arctic can still be bitterly cold and temperatures often dip as low as -30 degrees centigrade.

Throughout the nesting period, the mother bunting must stay on her nest for the full period of the incubation of her eggs. The rocks in the high Arctic wherein she nests can be extremely cold and she must ensure that

her precious eggs and nestlings stay warm and cosy at all times.

This is done by creating a nest which has a very thick lining of fine grasses, rootlets, fur and feathers. During this time the male snow bunting takes great care of her and brings her food almost every 15 minutes. Once hatched, the chicks are fed by both parents until they fledge around 10 to 17 days later.

The migration of snow buntings takes place at night. These clever little birds do not need visual cues to show them the way. They can detect the geomagnetic field of the earth and this guides them to their wintering grounds in our part of the world and back again to the high Arctic when it is time for nesting.

We might think that the snow bunting has a hard life due to the extreme cold and harsh conditions which it has to endure. However, they do not seem burdened with either cold or hunger. Like all the birds of the air, God's loving care sustains them and ensures that they have everything they need to flourish and thrive. ●

01. Snow bunting perched on the ground.

Image: Shutterstock

HA! HA!

1. What happens when Santa Claus gets stuck in a chimney?
2. Where do polar bears vote?
3. What did one gingerbread man say after all the others were eaten?
4. What do elves do after school?
5. What do tigers sing at Christmas?
6. Who is Santa's favourite singer?

1. He gets Claustrophobia!
2. The North Pole!
3. "It's hard to bake new friends!"
4. Their gnome work!
5. "Jungle Bells!"
6. Elf-is Presley!

COMPETITION WINNERS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2025

<p>Sienna Owen Liverpool</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under</p>	<p>Barney Howard Solihull</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Nicholas Skegness</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over</p>	<p>Gerard Mundakal Huddersfield</p> <p>2</p>
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR WELCOME AND SUPPORT!

During 2025 Columban Missionaries visited 120 churches in the dioceses of **Salford** and **Cardiff** for the annual Mission Appeal. Thank you for your hospitality and generous response! It was a pleasure to meet so many of YOU, our incredible supporters.



SCAN ME

In 2026, the Mission Appeals Team will visit parishes in **Hexham & Newcastle** and **Arundel & Brighton**.

Scan to meet the team or visit www.columbans.co.uk



MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST COLUMBAN ANNUAL REPORT

Columban Missionaries proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ with simplicity, dialogue, and unwavering solidarity. In communion with all people of goodwill, they strive to embody a synodal way of life—one that is transformative, empowering, and faithful to the Spirit's call in mission.

“This report reflects the enduring commitment of Columban missionaries to serve forgotten communities in diverse and often difficult contexts. It is also a testament to your vital role in this mission. Your prayers, encouragement, and generous support make it possible.”

Fr Andrei Paz, Society Leader



SCAN ME



2025



Discover the many ways your donations are making a difference through their support for Columban ministries and projects around the world.

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