

# far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

MAY/ JUNE 2026



**LIFE ON A  
PLATTER**

Upskilling  
Migrants

**VOCATION  
FOR JUSTICE**

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tribute

**WEB  
OF LIFE**

Columbans &  
the Higaonon

**04 Life on a Platter**

Fr Tim Mulroy writes about a workshop at the Columban Mission Centre in Peru equipping migrant women with baking and cooking skills to help them find work.



04

**06 Biodiversity 3: Web of Life**

James Trewby learns how the Columban relationship with the indigenous Higaonon people in the Philippines has blossomed into a reforestation project.



06

**08 Columban Competition Winners**

The winning article and the winning images in the 2026 Columban Schools Competition on the theme: "Becoming a refugee is never a choice, but how we respond is."



16

**10 Regrouping in Wuhan**

Fr Dan Troy recalls how the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang, founded by Columban Bishop Edward Galvin, re-emerged in Wuhan decades after political circumstances forced them to disband.

**12 Vocation for Justice at 40**

Becca Long spoke to Columban Missionary Fr Ed O'Connell and Columban co-worker Ellen Teague about **Vocation for Justice**, the Columban newsletter which has been promoting justice and highlighting injustice for four decades.

**14 Our Hope for the Future**

Columban Missionary Sr Minah Seo recalls the leadership shown by Korea's young people through their peaceful protests and their demands for justice following 2024's political upheaval.



08

**16 Unbeatable Fr Jones**

Fr Tom Looney has written the first biography of Irish sports star Fr Tom Jones who bestrode the world of handball and was a generous benefactor of the Columbans.



10

**18 Obituaries**

**20 Reflection**

**21 Stories from the Bible**

**22 Children's Section**

**23 Nature: Magical Mute Swans**



12



14

## THE FAR EAST

Published seven times yearly by the Missionary Society of St Columban (Maynooth Mission to China).

## 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.

## far east

### Annual Subscription

£15 UK

£25 Europe

£35 World

Contact the Mission Office:

Tel: (01564) 772 096

Email: fareast@columbans.co.uk

### Editor

Sarah Mac Donald

editorfareast@gmail.com

### Assistant Editor

Sr Ann Gray

### Layout & Editorial Assistant

Breda Rogers

### Manager

Stephen Awre

### Original Design

Gabriel German Carbone

### Printers

Walstead Peterborough

### Columban Websites

www.columbans.co.uk

www.columbansisters.org

### Follow us

X: @fareastmagazine

Facebook: www.facebook.com/fareastmagazine

### Missionary Society of

#### St Columban

Widney Manor Road, Solihull,  
West Midlands, B93 9AB.

Reg. charity 221594 (England & Wales) and SCO38948 (Scotland)

### Columban Sisters

Magheramore, Co Wicklow,  
A67 HY02. Tel: +353 (0404) 67348

### Front Cover

Columban missionary Fr Dylan Tabaco with Marisol Rojas, Coordinator of the Columban Mission Centre in Lima, along with migrant women who participated in a cake-making workshop.



**O**n many occasions I have recounted my vocational journey and how reading the novel, **The Song of Bernadette** by Franz Werfel, changed my life's trajectory. However, what I have never related was the specific traits of St Bernadette Soubirous' personality that awakened my lapsed Catholic faith.

As a child, I was fascinated with the lives of the saints. I enjoyed hearing about their mystical experiences of visions and miracles. Looking back, I realise that I rarely knew their human side, their practical life. This changed with St Bernadette.

As a young adult, after reading that novel on St Bernadette's life, it was not Bernadette's visions of Our Lady of Lourdes nor the miracle of her incorruptible body but Bernadette's personality and her hidden life in the convent that touched me.

As a visionary, Bernadette gained an unwanted celebrity status in France, which she rejected. She desired a life of hidden service. That is in stark contrast to today's culture of celebrity and addiction to social media recognition.

Upon entering the Sisters of Charity convent in Nevers (France), the mother superior convoked the entire community to listen to Bernadette's account of the visions and to ask questions. This was a one-time event, and all were strictly forbidden to ever discuss the matter again with Bernadette, and for that she was grateful.

Bernadette had a great desire to serve in the foreign missions, but her frail health prevented it. Often she was in the infirmary due to an illness of one type or another. Eventually the mother superior placed Bernadette in charge of the infirmary stating that since she was not good for much and spent all her time in the infirmary, she might as well be in charge. She dedicated herself completely to the mission that she was given.

It seems to me that St Bernadette's traits – stubbornness, a sense of humour, rejection of worldly fame and silent service – are missionary traits. For the mission belongs to God, and only God decides how the mission will be done. The missionary serves, often in silence in hidden places of the world, but with a sense of humour and a stubborn fortitude that all will work out in God's time.

It is strange to imagine that a peasant girl from 19<sup>th</sup> century France, a person so unlike myself, became a powerful spiritual guide in my missionary journey. But, as our patron St Columbanus stated, "a life unlike your own can be your teacher". ●

### Fr Chris Saenz

Columban Missionary Fr Chris Saenz is from Bellevue, Nebraska. He was ordained a priest in 2000 and served on mission in Chile. He was later regional director of the Columbans in the US. He now works in St Columban's, Nebraska.

01. Our Lady of Lourdes and St Bernadette.

Image: Shutterstock.





# LIFE ON A

Columban Missionary Fr Tim Mulroy writes about a ten-week workshop at the Columban Mission Centre in Lima equipping migrant women with baking and cooking skills to help them find work.

Could it be said that the reign of God is like a platter of various kinds of pastries which a group of women from different countries have learned to create together? Among a group of seventeen women who had come to live in the city of Lima, several were migrants from Ecuador, while others had arrived from Venezuela. They also included Peruvians from remote towns or villages who had travelled to the capital city in search of a better life for themselves and their families. One was a Peruvian who, after spending eight years in Mexico, now felt like a foreigner back in her home country.

Almost all of them felt overwhelmed by the frantic pace of city life, and though they were surrounded by over 11 million people, they frequently felt isolated and lonely without the support of their extended family, neighbours and friends. Since more than one quarter of Lima's population live in poverty, it is a major challenge for new arrivals to find suitable

accommodation and regular employment. Many of the seventeen women struggled to find work due to their low level of formal education, or they were unable to take on certain kinds of jobs due to family commitments.

They came together at the Columban Mission Centre in Lima to attend a series of ten workshops on making pastries, in the hope of equipping themselves to start a small business in their own home, which would enable them to provide additional financial support for their families. "However, the pastry-making workshops were intended not just to enable those seventeen women to support their families, but also to grow as people in their new surroundings," emphasised Marisol Rojas, Coordinator of the Columban Mission Centre.

Elaborating on this broader vision, she explained, "The sessions, which took place twice a week, were led by Elena, an experienced confectioner, so the participants learned the craft of pastry-



# PLATTER

making and explored their own creativity by experimenting with new recipes. At the same time, they grew in trust and in friendship with one another. Over the course of ten weeks, they gradually found the courage to talk with one another about their personal struggles in this huge city, developed the ability to laugh about their mistakes around the oven, and discovered the confidence to share about their dreams for themselves and their families. Moreover, as they listened to one another, they affirmed each other's courage and resilience. And the gratitude they felt for the ongoing nurturing of their skills and spirits frequently found expression in their spontaneous prayers at the beginning of each session."

Reflecting on his experience of supporting Marisol Rojas and accompanying another group of women who had participated in a similar workshop series at the Columban Mission Centre some months previously, Fr Dylan Tabaco, a Columban missionary from the

Philippines said, "Creating and baking, learning and relating together enabled the women from various backgrounds to understand and respect each other. Since all of them had experienced the prejudice and pain of being an outsider, they understood the importance of stretching one's mind and heart in order to go beyond superficial perceptions and come to know one another at a deeper level. The pastry-making workshops provided them with opportunities to make new friends, gave them confidence and skills to explore new ways to support their families; and deepened their faith in God who accompanies them through all the ups and downs of life."


While none of the women who have participated in the pastry-making workshops envisage their future as 'life on a platter,' all of them have discovered how a platter of delicious pastries nurtures their taste buds, their spirits and their dreams. ●

Fr Tim Mulroy from Co Mayo was ordained in 1995. He was Regional Director in the US between 2012-2018 and Columban Superior General between 2018-2024. He is now based in Britain.

Migrant women who took part in a workshop run by the Columban Mission Centre in Lima with Columban Missionaries Fr Dylan Tabaco and Fr Iowane Gukibau as well as Marisol Rojas, Coordinator of the programme. All photos courtesy of Columban Missionary Fr Martin Koroiciri who is on mission in Chile.

To make a comment on this article go to:

 [facebook.com/fareastmagazine](https://facebook.com/fareastmagazine)

 [@fareastmagazine](https://twitter.com/fareastmagazine)