

far east

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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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Front Cover

Columban Missionary Fr Pat Colgan with two parishioners, a mother and daughter, from Fiji where increasing ocean temperatures are killing off coral reefs and depleting fish stocks, while higher land temperatures lead to mosquitoes going further inland, with many Fijians succumbing to the dengue fever the insects often bring.
Photo: Fr Pat Colgan



The church recognises and celebrates all vocations. We have all experienced being called to lay down something of ourselves in order to set out on a new journey to follow the Spirit.

I remember saying to myself, when discerning my vocation fifty years ago, "If I don't do this, I will always regret not having done it". I imagine that many young people are asking themselves similar questions.

Pope Francis' 2015 Vocation Sunday message reminds me that all vocations are God's work.

"Hearing and following the voice of Christ the Good Shepherd, means letting ourselves be attracted and guided by him, in consecration to him; it means allowing the Holy Spirit to draw us into this missionary dynamism, awakening within us the desire, the joy and the courage to offer our own lives in the service of the Kingdom of God."

All of this is profoundly rooted in love. The Christian vocation is first and foremost a call to love, a love which attracts us and draws us out of ourselves, "decentring" us and triggering "an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God" (Deus Caritas Est, 6).

...vocation is always a work of God. He leads us beyond our initial situation, frees us from every enslavement, breaks down our habits and our indifference, and brings us to the joy of communion with him and with our brothers and sisters.

Responding to God's call, then, means allowing him to help us leave ourselves and our false security behind, and to strike out on the path which leads to Jesus Christ, the origin and destiny of our life and our happiness.

Dear young friends, never be afraid to go out from yourselves and begin the journey!"

A recent article, 'Gallup: Young men are an 'emerging exception' among the 'low ebb' of religiosity in US' in **America Magazine** (17th April 2026) helps me reflect on how young men are living their faith today. According to the poll, young men are trending upwards in monthly or frequent attendance at religious services, with 40% doing so in 2024-2025, the highest level since 2012-2013, and up from about 33% in 2022-2023, according to Gallup. The article in **America Magazine** reminds me that our work is to "meet young people where they are and provide a pathway to encounter".

It may be a difficult time to think about vocations, and perhaps that is why we should be more responsive and encouraging rather than passive. When cynicism takes hold, it takes courage to open ourselves to God, who frees us from our indifference. I realise at this stage of my life that my vocation today is as much about saying yes to young people as they search for their call as it was about saying yes to God all those years ago. ●

Fr Arturo Aguilar

Columban Missionary Fr Arturo Aguilar is the Vocations Contact Person in the US Region



communiTREES

Trees teach us lessons about how to conserve biodiversity writes Columban Novice Karen Lanipao, as she considers some of the benefits of the wonderful trees she has encountered in Magheramore and her native Philippines.

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A place like Magheramore, blessed with many incredible trees, evokes a feeling of 'at-homeness' and the warmth of a 'TREEmendous' embrace. I'm no expert on trees but by looking at the texture of some of the barks and the structure of the trees as well as their branch size, I know some of them are decades-old and others have been here for a century or more.

Taking time with Magheramore's trees connects me to the trees I loved in the Philippines. For those of us who are from the Cordillera Mountain Range, trees are our immediate neighbours. They are mostly the common home-grown fruit-bearing trees like the Philippine Mango which is known for its sweet and flavourful dessert fruit, and the Indian Mango with its evergreen fruit. Both are mainly called *Mangga*. Climbing these trees was an afternoon of fun during summer school breaks for me and I got to relish a fulfilling treat of salted green mangoes while enjoying the solitude of my sanctuary in the bosom of their thick foliage.

In 2016, the tropical storm Super Typhoon Haima toppled many of these trees. Sadly, the Philippine Pomelo (*Shimma*), Spanish Plum (*Sineguelas*), Soursop (Guyabano), and a few trees of

Coconut (*Ihjoog*) and Papaya (*Apahjhe*) did not survive. Thankfully, two Mango trees miraculously recovered and continue to bear fruit. How did it happen?

Indigenous farmers innate wisdom: storm damaged trees with some roots still clinging to the ground have a better chance of survival if left unbothered. But simple acts of care from my mother and sister, who occasionally put soil, compost and dried leaves onto the roots, could have helped. Whenever I go home, I am always amazed to see how they managed to survive. One curved its trunk to almost 90° from the ground while another transformed a branch with a better sun exposure into the trunk.

During a special family gathering hosted by my late brother, Manong Bonie, who was a farmer himself, I was delighted to see a basketful of fresh Philippine Lime fruits (*Dhayajap*) which he had gathered from his backyard. I lauded his effort in planting this vanishing indigenous tree but he said, "Oh no, it wasn't me. My wise friends did it." He was referring to the birds! The Guava (*Bayabas*) tree-shrubs in the wild are propagated this way.

Fruit picking at a thicket of Guava trees is a fond childhood memory. One Sunday morning after Mass, I stopped by

“Contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us.”

- Laudato Si 85



for a snack with my *Lola* (grandmother). Following her advice, I climbed, leaving the low-lying fruits for cows, carabaos, goats, pigs and those who could not climb, reserving some ripe fruits for the birds and insects, and collecting only what I needed.

In Kalinga, we take pride in the Balbalasang-Balbalan National Park which is largely a Pine (*Sayong*) Forest. It is one of the vast expanses of old-growth forests in the country maintained and preserved by indigenous communities (Foundation for the Philippine Environment, 2026). A visit to relatives while I was still in school was my first opportunity to visit the forest. I was awestruck by the uniform spacing and orderly pattern of the pine trees.

Visiting the Sabang Mangrove (*Bakawan*) Forest in the island of Palawan was a cherished encounter. My friend and I burst into tears on our arrival at the site which has an important heritage of Mangrove trees. It was so surreal to see their protruding large woody roots, their towering trunks and their canopy overshadowing the forest floor's massive and complex root systems. We were elated when we were given the chance to plant some Mangrove propagules. The 1981 Presidential Proclamation declared Palawan Island as a Mangrove Swamp Forest Reserve. The Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018 legalised the conservation and protection of this enchanting coastal forest.

However, 50% of these Mangrove ecosystems was severely damaged by Super Typhoon Rai in 2021 according to the Green Assessment Framework Report (2022). This shows that local policies and actions are not enough to conserve and protect our communiTREES.

It demands biodiversity-based global policies and collective action worldwide such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative.

For decades, our faithful neighbours who have been shielding us from extreme impacts of the climate disasters hitting the Philippines annually while facing the threat of destruction from up to 190 mining projects teach fundamental lessons about biodiversity conservation. If trees are planted imitating how the forests grow naturally in terms of density and diversity, they reinforce each other. Moreover, mangrove forests thrive better when left to their own way of recovery. All they ask is for the freedom to be in their own home. ●



Sr Karen Lanipao, a Novice with the Columban Sisters, is from the Philippines.

01. Sr Karen stands amid the blooming orchard in Magheramore, Co Wicklow. All Photos: Sr Karen Lanipao.
02. The Great Redwood in Magheramore.
03. Springtime in Magheramore.
04. Mangrove trees in the Sabang Mangrove (*Bakawan*) Forest on the island of Palawan in the Philippines.