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Cover photo: Columban supporters help rebuild homes in Pakistan after devastating floods, bringing hope and stability to needy families.

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THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST TODAY



In July, as part of my role as Regional Director Oceania, I visited the Columbans in Fiji. As per Fijian custom, a group of us sat around drinking kava, made from the powdered root of a pepper plant native to the Pacific, mixed with water and strained into a communal bowl.

It is used ritually on ceremonial occasions to welcome and acknowledge important guests. It is also used socially to bond groups and relax among friends. It is a wonderful way of building community.

As I looked around the six Columbans, I marvelled at our diversity. We were Australian, Banaban from Rabi Island, Chinese Fijian, Kachin from Myanmar, Korean, and Tongan. The two Columbans from St Pius X Parish in Raiwaqa would have added British and Indo-Fijian; the two Columbans currently on home holiday would have given us Irish; and the Mission Office staff would have added Indigenous Fijian and Rotuman. A small group of Columbans from eleven different ethnicities, all committed to the one mission of Jesus Christ. This unity in diversity is one of the fruits of Pentecost, when people of differing nationalities all heard about the marvellous works of God in their own language (*c.f. Acts 2:1-11*).

Columbans make this miracle of Pentecost come alive for people in many countries around the world. We learn to speak their languages, adapt to their cultures, observe their customs, wear their national dress - so they can hear the word of God in their own languages and see it embodied in their culture. The local churches form a wonderful international symphony of unity in diversity.

St Columban once said, "A life unlike your own can be your teacher." When you think about it, it's only those who are different from us who can teach us anything new. If we only listen to the same people, hear the same stories, see the same things, eat the same foods, drink from the same well, we will live in an echo

chamber, hearing our own voices over and over, learning nothing new.

But if we listen to others, hear their stories, see different things, eat different foods, taste different drinks, our world will be expanded, our hearts and minds will be enlarged. We will learn new things and live in a richer, more diverse world - and be at home there.

I thank God that I went to Pakistan as a newly ordained priest and was transformed by the experience of living among and learning from the Pakistani people. Columbans have been doing this for decades in various countries. Increasingly, we are doing it with each other; in Fiji, missionaries from different countries, ethnicities and languages serve people together.

Now, as many Columbans increase in age and decrease in number, we are learning to work with lay people who share our vision of mission - old and young, men and women, lay and ordained, of many ethnicities, sharing our different talents, all working together for the sake of mission.

Now that international travel and waves of migration have brought people from around the world together in multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious societies, we no longer have to go "overseas" to find people who are different from us. They are living on our doorstep. They are living in our neighbourhoods.

As Christians, we are called to reach out to others, especially those who are suffering and in need, to migrants who are far from home and feeling lonely, and to refugees fleeing violence, war and famine. When we show concern for others, we fulfil the vision of Pope Francis: Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all (*Fratelli Tutti*, 8).

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY
Regional Director of Oceania

SINDH HOUSING PROJECT FOR FLOOD AFFECTEES



The construction of a new home made out of mud bricks in Pakistan.
Photos: Fr Liam O'Callaghan SSC

"I have seen many humanitarian disasters in the world, but I have never seen climate carnage on this scale." These words were uttered by UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres on September 10, 2022, as he visited the areas worst affected by the unprecedented monsoon flooding.

The rain continued relentlessly for over two months - from mid-June to the end of August; it was the worst monsoon in Pakistan in decades, and the Government declared a national emergency with almost five times the normal rainfall in Sindh and Balochistan. The scale of the disaster was staggering - 33 million people out of a population of about 229 million affected, over 1,700 killed, more than 13,000 injured and damage and economic loss estimated at \$30 billion.

The damage to infrastructure in the affected areas was enormous - 13,115 kilometres of roads damaged, 439 bridges destroyed, crops damaged and destroyed and over 1.1 million livestock lost. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around eight million

flood-affected people needed health assistance, including essential medical supplies and access to essential health care. But probably the worst reality was the loss of about 2.2 million houses, which were either damaged or destroyed, 1.5 million in Sindh alone, leaving many poor people homeless and forced to live in temporary shelters provided by government and non-government agencies. As is often the case, it is the poor who are worst affected because their housing is already very fragile to begin with.

So we set about trying to make a difference through a housing project made possible by a donation from Columbans in the Oceania Region, through the Columban Overseas Aid Fund (COAF).

In choosing a house design, we were greatly helped by a construction guide jointly produced by the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) of the Pakistan government, which provided scientifically tested guidance on low-cost solutions for Sindh that were flood-resistant and compatible with vernacular architecture and indigenous construction techniques.

The Construction Guide aims to provide flood-resilient, low-cost one-room shelters to the most vulnerable families using locally available materials that minimise adverse environmental impacts. The materials - mud bricks, clay, bamboo, timber windows and doors - are all sourced locally, with little or no carbon footprint. It was simply ideal and tailor-made for the situation we found ourselves in.

The location of the housing project is in the Mirpurkhas and Umerkot districts of interior Sindh, which were badly flooded, and it took several months for life to return to anything approaching normality. The families receiving the housing are from the Parkari Kohli indigenous community, among whom the Columbans have been working since 1983 in different areas of Sindh.

As an indigenous and religious minority community, the Parkari Kohli face many issues - poverty, discrimination, lack of security as farm workers for landlords, lack of education opportunities, poor health facilities, etc. The recipients are Christian and Hindu.

We are grateful for the generous support of donors, whose generosity is helping the poorest of the poor to re-build their lives. Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effects of climate change.



A Parkari Kohli family of four in front of their new one room home.

Building began on the first house on February 1, 2023, with a target of 120 homes by the end of January, 2024. We spent the weeks before identifying locations and communities affected, undertaking an assessment of the damaged houses and compiling a final list based on the assessment report.

Meetings with beneficiaries were held to ensure clarity of the process of demolishing the damaged house and building the new house on that site, as well as locating quality materials to use - mud bricks, clay, bamboo, timber, a contract with a carpenter for windows and doors, straw and hiring of masons, labourers and carpenters and other support staff.

We are grateful for the generous support of donors, whose generosity is helping the poorest of the poor to re-build their lives. Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effects of climate change. Extreme weather events such as the flooding of 2022 will most likely occur regularly in the future, but hopefully those 120 families will be able to live securely in their new homes for years to come.

FR LIAM O'CALLAGHAN AND DANISH YAKOOB

Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan is the Columban Mission Unit Coordinator and Coordinator for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and Inter-Religious Dialogue in Pakistan. Columban co-worker Danish Yakoob works with Fr Liam.

MY MIRACLE CURE: A PRIVILEGE TO PRAY



Marion Carroll grew up in a very different Ireland, where the arrival of *The Far East* magazine every month was a highlight because it provided a glimpse into the world of people far away from her hometown of Athlone. In 1989, at death's door after 17 years of life with multiple sclerosis, Marion travelled to Knock. Then her life changed forever.

"When we got to Knock, they brought me into the nurse, and she settled all the things you do with an invalid. I was too sick to be brought to the Basilica immediately, so I was taken to the rest and care centre. Eventually, just before Mass, we went over to the Basilica and they put me under the statue of Our Lady of Knock and when I looked up at the statue, that's the statue they carry in the procession, I thought she was the most beautiful and friendliest statue I had ever seen in my life.

I wanted another housewife, another woman to talk to me who would understand what was within me and I looked back up at the statue of Our Lady, and I said to her, 'You are a mother too, you know how I feel about leaving my husband and children.'

It wasn't a prayer, it wasn't a statement, it was just one woman chatting to another. I then prayed to her to look after my husband and children and to give them the grace to accept my death as the will of God."

During the Blessing of the Sick, Marion experienced a new sensation. "I got this magnificent feeling - a wonderful sensation like a whispering breeze telling me that I was cured. A nurse opened the stretcher, and my two legs swung out and I stood up straight. It was the first time in three years I had been able to do so. I am convinced it was a miracle. My speech was perfect, and my hands and arms were perfect. I was standing unaided on my own two feet."

"Standing there that moment I saw my own heart right in front of me. And it was so full of joy and peace and a love without end. It was shining, looking directly into the sun. Then the rays came towards me, and I got all these gifts of joy, peace, love and a lot of other things."

The Columbans bear witness to a Christianity which has a vital, personal quality rather than being something worn ostentatiously like a religious emblem and a spirituality that is deep, mysterious and beautiful, a religion that gives sympathy to our hearts and understanding to our minds. They are particularly conscious of the wisdom of Brendan Kennelly's incisive words, 'Self knows that self is not enough.'

In September 2019, thirty years after that experience, the Catholic Church officially recognised her cure. In her book *My Miracle Cure*, Marion shares her story for the first time. Over thirty years on she continues to enjoy good health.

Marion is convinced that her cure is a gift from God so that she can help congregations like the Columban missionaries in their work. "I am enthralled by the compassion of God and Jesus to people."

"There are days when I'm very far away from this, but I'm always inspired by the image of Jesus in the Gospels. He was someone who brought the compassion of God to people, someone who didn't judge or condemn. He was someone who was with people wherever they were, especially those who found themselves on the margins of society. That is why I really admire people like the Columbans because of the work they do with people who are unable to help themselves."

"Unlike the Columbans, I am not called to be a missionary. However, I can help them. Prayer is an important component in my life. When I pray I do so for groups like the Columbans. Since I was a young girl, I have been very familiar with the work they do through reading *The Far East*. I draw strength from my God who is compassionate, supportive and understanding. He is hard to shock."

"I feel it is a privilege to use my very limited talents to pray for people like the Columbans, who are playing their part in alleviating the suffering of this world and who strive to bring about change for those who are poor and oppressed."

The Columbans bear witness to a Christianity which has a vital, personal quality rather than being something worn ostentatiously like a religious emblem and a spirituality that is deep, mysterious and beautiful, a religion that gives sympathy to our hearts and understanding to our minds. They are particularly conscious of the wisdom of Brendan Kennelly's incisive words, 'Self knows that self is not enough.'

As a community where everyone's needs are met through the caring and sharing of each one in the community, where everyone feels loved, valued and respected, would surely be the Kingdom of God on earth.

If Jesus Christ today is to offer hope to those who are struggling, who live on the edge, who feel unwanted, that hope is in people like the Columbans. I will keep praying for them to help them build the kingdom on earth as in heaven."

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REFLECTION

A CONCLAVE OF HOPE AND A CALL FOR PEACE

In recent months, many of us have watched *Conclave*, the timely drama promoted as a thriller. The film was well acted and skilfully directed, capturing the grandeur and intensity of the Vatican with colours even more vivid than reality. Yet, despite its promising start, it ended on a strangely farcical note, undermining some of its initial intrigue. Still, the film was a fascinating introduction to the real-life events that would soon unfold.

POPE LEO XIV

Not long after, the world's attention shifted from fiction to history in the making. Televisions everywhere broadcast the familiar yet always thrilling sight: a puff of white smoke rising from the chimney atop the Sistine Chapel. The seagulls perched on the roof shuffled as the smoke billowed, and the crowds in St Peter's Square surged forward, filled with excitement and hope. I can only imagine how the newly elected pope must have felt as he stepped onto the balcony, gazing upon the sea of waving national flags, each representing people waiting in hope.

Among those flags were those of Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, and the Congo - all places where conflict and human suffering continue to scar the earth. Bloodshed and destruction mark these lands, reminders of the wars Pope Francis so often lamented, insisting again and again: *Nobody wins a war.*

The man who emerged as Pope Leo came to this burdensome and expectation-laden role exceptionally well-prepared. His life journey has equipped him with deep pastoral and global experience. As a young priest, he was evangelised by Peru's poor and rural communities, who shaped his understanding of faith, service, and humility.

He later served as Augustinian Provincial in the United States and became the world leader of his religious order. His mission brought him back to Peru, where he taught in a seminary and eventually became the Archbishop of the Peruvian diocese of Chiclayo in northern Peru. More recently, he held a critical leadership role in Rome as the head of the Dicastery for Bishops. Pope Leo intimately knows both the northern and southern churches; he has walked alongside the poor, administered local dioceses, and navigated the complexities of the Vatican. He is no stranger to the real and often painful issues facing the global Church and the world.

Beyond the grandeur and ritual of his election, what truly captured my attention were his first words from the balcony and the key message of his inaugural homily. His prayer, his vision, and his hope are centred on peace - peace for those gathered in the piazza and for the entire world to which he has now been called to serve - a world tragically not just at war but seemingly always preparing for the next one.

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Pope Leo specifically named three regions that weigh heavily on his heart: Ukraine, Gaza and Myanmar. These are places of immense suffering, where innocent people are caught in the crossfire of the inflated egos and unchecked ambitions of powerful men. He pleaded for a peace that the world cannot give - one that only God can offer. He offered us two pillars upon which this true peace can be built: love and unity. Love is the living presence of the Holy Spirit among us, and the one essential command Jesus gave is to love one another as I have loved you. Unity is the deep yearning expressed in Jesus' prayer: *That all may be one, just as the Father and I are one.*

Pope Leo called upon the Church to be a leaven in a world in desperate need of reconciliation. But peace, as he gently reminded us, is not passive. It is a gift that must be embraced and actively worked on. True peace is not simply the absence of violence. It is the fullness of life shared, a love that places others first.

In his invitation to us all, Pope Leo simply asks: *Come to Jesus. Listen to Him. Follow Him.* Through this path, the hope for a reconciled world becomes possible.

FR JOHN HEGERTY

Columban Fr John Hegerty lives in Australia.

In his invitation to us all, Pope Leo simply asks: Come to Jesus. Listen to Him. Follow Him.

FAITH AND TRANSFORMATION

"It is time to harvest my life experience," reflects Fr Michael Cuddigan SSC, as he prepares to retire and return to Ireland this July. After more than a decade of service in Hong Kong and over 50 years as a Columban missionary priest, Fr Cuddigan's journey has been one of faith, transformation, and deep pastoral presence.

Ordained in 1971 at the age of 24 at the Columban seminary in Dalgan Park, Ireland, Fr Cuddigan was first sent to the southern Philippines. He ministered to village communities there, served as a hospital chaplain, and worked in campus ministry. His missionary path later took him to Australia and New Zealand before returning to Mindanao in the 1990s to focus on vocation ministry and leading retreats.



Columban Fr Michael Cuddigan at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong, 2020.

Looking back over his priesthood, Fr Cuddigan describes it as a journey shaped by joy and challenge: "The last 54 years as a priest have given me different life experiences - the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful ones. And now I speak out of them."

He emphasises the importance of storytelling in preaching, believing that sharing real human experiences, including personal imperfections and moments of grace, can bring hope to others. "People relate to the stories of life and faith. When we are open and honest, it encourages others who may be facing similar struggles."

In his early years, however, he found preaching difficult. He often relied heavily on notes and struggled with confidence. He recalls how, during his time in the Philippines, he preferred giving homilies in simple village settings - like nipa huts filled with joyful faces - over formal congregations. "As a young man, I was Michael the cleric. Now I am more Michael the human being," he says with a smile.

Fr Cuddigan arrived in Hong Kong in 2013. One of his first memories is of sitting alone in Kennedy Town, looking across the harbour. "I said to myself, nobody knows me, and I know nobody." It was a moment of vulnerability, transition, and the beginning of a new chapter of connection and growth.

"The last 54 years as a priest have given me different life experiences - the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful ones. And now I speak out of them."

He was appointed assistant priest at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception where he served from 2013 to 2017. There, he began building deep relationships with the local community while maintaining his commitment to daily prayer and



Columban Fr Michael Cuddigan with his family on the day of his ordination.

quiet reflection. He fondly refers to his office in the Cathedral as “Cuddigan’s seat,” where he often spent time contemplating during his “holy hour.”

In recent years, he has served as the rector of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel, ministering primarily to Hong Kong’s Filipino migrant community. With his years of experience in the Philippines, Fr Cuddigan quickly found common ground through shared language and cultural understanding. “Their dedication to family, faith, and community has greatly inspired me.”

He currently celebrates Sunday Masses for the Filipino community and weekday and Saturday Masses for others in the neighbourhood. Before his departure, he hopes to leave the community with a message: “Let your faith be coloured by God’s love - with gratitude and joy.”

Ever creative and pastoral, Fr Cuddigan also launched a YouTube channel to share his homilies, embracing digital tools to reach people beyond the church walls. “When we speak honestly about our struggles, it helps others feel less alone - and it helps me too,” he says.

Fr Cuddigan’s outreach extended to the airwaves as well. For over a decade, he contributed to Christian

ecumenical radio broadcasts in Hong Kong and once led the religious section of RTHK. He credits these experiences with shaping his approach to preaching. He recalls co-host John Meirs’ words: “Don’t worry about perfect English - people only remember what’s said in simple words.” That advice stayed with him. “If a message is too polished, people forget it. Simplicity speaks.”

As he returns to Ireland, Fr Cuddigan looks forward to a quieter life, where he can continue his ministry in new ways - through daily Mass, visiting the sick, and offering spiritual companionship. “It’s time to pass on what I’ve received,” he says.

Fr Cuddigan’s journey reminds us that the call to mission does not end with age or retirement - it simply takes a new form. Through his witness, he shows us that transformation is possible at every stage of life, and that even after decades of service, the Spirit continues to lead us forward.

FR JOSEKUTTY MATHEW CMF & GINIA LEUNG

Fr Josekutty Mathew CMF is the Deputy Editor and Ginia Leung is a reporter at the Sunday Examiner in Hong Kong.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY: "SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES"



Internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp in Nawng Chin Parish.

The Columban Mission Office team continues to accompany the people of Myanmar through its work aligned with the Columban Mission Priorities - particularly in the areas of biodiversity conservation and the accompaniment of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These two priorities - care for our common home and solidarity with the displaced - remain deeply interwoven in the life and mission of the Church in Myanmar.

In addition to marking *Laudato Si' Week* with ecological reflections and awareness-raising, the Columban Mission Office has carried out pastoral visits to a number of IDP camps across the region. The numbers of displaced families and individuals continue to grow rapidly, particularly as the ongoing conflict spreads into areas that had previously escaped direct violence.

We heard heartbreaking stories from displaced people in several camps. "Entire villages have been burned, one house after another," shared one mother in Namti. Her voice carried both sorrow and exhaustion as she described the many times her family had been forced to move, always seeking a safer place. "We no longer have homes, or farms, or certainty," she said. Another young mother shared that the presence of Burmese soldiers in their village meant that there was no possibility of returning - not now, and perhaps not ever.

I joined Fr La Lung, the Myitkyina Diocesan Youth Director and a member of the Diocesan Emergency Response Team (DERT), on a pastoral visit to the parishes of Namti and Mogaung in early June. These two parishes have become sanctuaries for hundreds of families displaced from surrounding villages. We first arrived at Namti Parish, which has welcomed families from Lawa and other villages since March 2025. Initially, these families were housed within parish structures and makeshift tents in the town centre.

In June, after lengthy negotiations, the township authorities permitted the displaced families to rent

a section of government land. There, they are now attempting to construct more “permanent” shelters from bamboo, plastic tarps, and tarpaulin sheets. While this represents a step forward, conditions remain harsh. When strong winds blow or the rains fall - as they often do during the monsoon season - the shelters leak, and the interiors become cold and wet. Families crowd together at night to stay warm.

Fr La Lung spoke with the camp leader to understand their most pressing needs. The head of the camp explained that while 300 families have already settled in, they expect at least 100 more in the coming weeks. Yet, the camp currently has only 11 functioning toilet facilities and limited access to clean water. The fear of sanitation-related diseases looms large. “We are praying there won’t be an outbreak, but we know the risk is high,” he said.

We were hosted overnight at Namti Parish by Fr Tu Hkawng, the local parish priest. Early the next morning, we travelled to St Peter’s Parish in Mogaung, where more displaced families from Kamaing and nearby villages had sought shelter. A catechist welcomed us and shared that their food stores were nearly depleted. Many people, he added, were still hiding in the forests, afraid of both armed conflict and displacement. “We don’t know how long they can stay hidden,” he said quietly. “They are running out of everything.”

Last month, I also joined Columban lay missionaries Michael Javier and Cata Son from our office in visiting Nawng Chin Parish, one of the newest parishes in the region. Created only last year, it is now host to ten separate IDP camps scattered across its territory. When fighting escalated in a nearby area, families fled and found temporary refuge here.

The most recent survey of Nawng Chin Parish reveals 1,707 individuals living across ten camps. Five camps are located near the parish church compound, the others are more remote. Some camps are building new shelters with bamboo and salvaged materials, but most still face the need for repairs and access to basic services. Food supplies are stretched thin, clean water is limited, and electricity is scarce or non-existent.

The situation continues to deteriorate as displacement spreads. What is most concerning is that even as the number of displaced persons increases, international humanitarian support to Myanmar has significantly



Columban Fr Kurt Zion (left) and Columban lay missionaries Cata Son and Michael Javier (right) visiting the IDP camps in Nawng Chin Parish.

declined. Global attention has shifted elsewhere, leaving vulnerable families and communities to rely increasingly on local church efforts, small-scale donations, and prayerful solidarity.

And yet, amidst all of this, hope remains. We witness it in the tireless work of parish volunteers who share what little they have. We hear it in the quiet courage of mothers who care for their children in shelters made of tarps and bamboo. We see it in the faith of the catechists who continue to teach and serve, even while displaced themselves. This hope is not naïve - it is born of deep suffering, but also of deep resilience.

On *World Refugee Day*, we are reminded that solidarity is not just a feeling of compassion - it is an action. It is showing up. It is walking alongside the displaced. It is helping amplify their voices and respond to their needs.

We thank each of you for your continued support of our efforts to accompany the displaced families and individuals here in Myanmar. Your prayers, your generosity, and your shared commitment allow us to remain present - to offer not just material aid, but hope, friendship, and dignity.

As the conflict continues, we will continue to go where we are needed. We will listen, we will advocate, and we will serve - together.

FR KURT ZION PALA

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.

WHY BIRMINGHAM?



Mauricio Silva (right) with Shi'a and Sunny, Muslim leaders. Photo: Mauricio Silva

Nurturing “life-giving relationships between people of different faiths and backgrounds” has been identified over the past decades as one of the Region of Britain’s mission priorities. This priority is mainly, but not exclusively, lived out in Birmingham.

The city of Birmingham stands among Europe's largest multicultural cities. The 2021 census identified that the city’s ethnic minorities represent more than 50% of the total population. Academics and politicians now use the term “super-diverse” to describe the city. This points not only to the realisation that minority

communities represent a majority in the city but also to the fact that these changes have happened at a speed and on a scale not seen elsewhere before.

No wonder that Birmingham’s super-diversity has become a special “locus” for Columban mission, where the Columban missionary outreach has translated into supporting and accompanying newly arrived communities, offering hospitality for asylum seekers and refugees, as well as hosting meaningful encounters with people of other faiths.

How have we done it? Throughout the years, many ordained and lay Columban missionaries have ministered to these *periferias existenciales* (existential peripheries), a Spanish term proposed by the late Pope Francis to describe those vulnerable groups that

BIRMINGHAM

are excluded in church and society. Although left out by political, sociological and economic structures, these groups should be at the core of the church's missionary endeavours and strategies, Pope Francis insisted.

This is a call to walk away from the centres of power, influence and wealth, stripping ourselves of the privileges that make us complicit in exclusionary structures. From that perspective, these peripheries can be found in any context, even in the "wealthy" UK, the fifth largest economy in the world. Birmingham - the UK's second-largest city - has a power of attraction that paradoxically matches with its opposite: its power to alienate and isolate large sections of society.

Journeying into those existential peripheries in this city for more than two decades has meant that Columbans in Birmingham have had to learn how to side with those on the margins. And we have done it by supporting community initiatives in poor and highly diverse areas in the city, accompanying people who seek sanctuary, and building bridges with faith communities who feel alienated and detached. Coming face-to-face with people confronting these challenges - making ourselves available to spend time with them - has helped us to listen deeply to people's real concerns and hopes. In those hopes and fears, we seek to hear the calling to - and the signs of - God's reign in this part of the world.

Acknowledging the contribution that this part of the Columban world makes to the global fundraising efforts of the Society, Columbans assigned to work here join a proud tradition of engagement with local mission. We celebrate this engagement - like many other Columban missions over the past century - and summarise it with Ken Untener's words (in the prayer often attached to St Oscar Romero's story):
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

MAURICIO SILVA

Columban co-worker Mauricio Silva is the Interreligious Dialogue Co-ordinator in Britain.



We invite primary and secondary school students in Australia to participate in our 2025 Season of Creation school competition, which focuses on the theme, 'Peace with Creation.'

This year, we ask students to reflect on what "Peace with Creation" means by responding to one of the following questions through a drawing, piece of artwork, an essay, or a poem:

1. What does "peace with creation" mean to you?
2. What are some practical ways to be at peace in creation?
3. How can we reconcile our relationship with creation from destruction to peace?

Let this Season of Creation be a time where young voices lead the way, and together we transform today's wilderness into tomorrow's fruitful field of justice, hope and peace. This Season of Creation helps restore God's Shalom. Together, through the Spirit, let's bring peace to our world - one voice, one brushstroke, one word at a time.

Enter submissions by September 1, 2025!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO WATCH the 2025 Season of Creation Columban School Competition Video **SCAN QR**



BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

JUNE 2025 IN KOREA

On June 3, 2025, South Korea elected a new president, Lee Jae-Myung, marking the end of six months of political turmoil and uncertainty. The election followed the impeachment of former President Yoon Suk-Yeol for attempting to stage a military coup last December. While the coup failed, it triggered six months of instability as the country went through the process of impeaching Yoon and removing him from power.

Lee Jae-Myung represents a new vision for South Korea. His first major address on National Memorial Day (June 6), laid out a vision of inclusivism for the future, embracing all those who have sacrificed themselves for the country and extending the hand of peace to North Korea. It was a total contrast to

the constant mantra of the former president, whose favourite themes were “the threat within the country” from “anti-state forces” and the “outside threat from North Korea”. It is a sign of a new beginning that will hopefully bear fruit!

In the Columban world in South Korea, we woke up on Sunday June 1, 2025, to the news that Columban Fr Noel O’Neill had died in Ireland. Fr Noel, ordained in 1956, worked in South Korea from 1957 to 2024. In the early 1980s, he established the Emmaus Welfare Foundation in Gwangju. The organisation focuses on the dignity, rights, and inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities, promoting a model of care that emphasises community integration rather than institutionalisation. Through his leadership, Emmaus established group homes, sheltered workshops, and education centres, empowering people with disabilities to live fuller, more independent lives.

Fr Noel significantly influenced how Korean society views and treats people with disabilities. South Korea has recognised his work through numerous national awards, as well as South Korean citizenship. At 93,

Columban Fr Noel O’Neill in the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday.



he was one of the last surviving members of that generation of Columbans who came to South Korea in the aftermath of the Korean War. Fr Noel's death truly marked the end of an era for the Columbans in South Korea.

Fr Noel significantly influenced how Korean society views and treats people with disabilities.

And yet, as one era ends, another begins. On June 7, 2025, Korean Columban Lee Jongrak Verano was ordained a Columban priest in his home parish in the Daegu Archdiocese. On that day, Columban sisters, priests, lay missionaries, benefactors, and friends all converged on Verano's home parish and joined the local parishioners in celebrating his ordination.

It was a festive atmosphere for both the ordination on Saturday and the Thanksgiving Mass on Sunday, Pentecost Sunday. The joy and excitement of the community were palpable. The parish yard was covered with huge tents, where food was served to everyone on both days.

At the ordination ceremony, Fr Augustine Lee Je-hoon, the Coordinator of the Columban Mission in Myanmar, welcomed Fr Verano to the Mission, presenting him with a traditional Kachin hat and bag.

Fr Verano will join the small group of Columbans in Myitkyina Diocese, in the north of the country, who are accompanying the Kachin people at this difficult time in their history. Since the coup d'état of 2021, Myanmar has continued to suffer the brutal effects of civil war.

The first week of June in South Korea was indeed a time when the country and the Columbans serving there experienced the full spectrum of emotions, ranging from mourning to joy, from uncertainty to hope. It was a time when we had a very concrete experience of Pentecost, of the Spirit continuing to work among us!

FR DONAL O'KEEFFE

Columban Fr Donal O'Keeffe lives and works in Korea.



Columban Fr Noel O'Neill participates in an activity with friends.

Fr Noel's death truly marked the end of an era for the Columbans in South Korea.

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Photos: Fr Donal O'Keeffe SSC

AUGUST 2025 | 17

HOPE IS WHAT KEEPS US GOING

Around the world, a large proportion of people are born into situations marked by poverty, adversity, and struggle. These are the people who, from their earliest years, must strive to survive, often in the face of deeply entrenched inequality, social exclusion and hardship. For many, just living day to day demands courage and resilience. They must work hard to build a future out of limited resources and often do so under the weight of unjust systems or historical burdens not of their own making.

In this context, hope becomes not a vague or sentimental feeling, but a profound inner strength. Hope is the virtue that gives us the capacity to keep going when there is no clear path forward. It strengthens our resolve and energises our efforts, even in situations that seem impossible. Like all virtues, hope is a gift from God - available to all. It is not earned but received. And in my experience, it is often most powerfully lived out by those who have the least.

During my forty years living and working in Lima, Peru, I was confronted daily with the struggle of families living in poverty. These were people who built homes out of scrap materials, fetched water from distant sources, worked long hours for meagre wages, and raised children amidst profound uncertainty. And yet, what stood out most was not despair - it was determination. It was the presence of something deeper that kept them moving forward, caring for one another and hoping for a better future. This, I came to understand, was hope. It was living, breathing, persevering hope.

I concluded that God has a deep preference for the poor and for those who walk with them in the pursuit

of justice. This divine preference isn't based on religion or status - it flows from the heart of God, who is always close to those who suffer. And I believe that those who align themselves with the poor - whether through faith, activism, or compassionate service - are sharing in this divine mission.

Hope and faith are virtues that are meant for this life. They orient us towards action, trust and perseverance while we are on earth. Love, or charity, is the virtue that endures beyond this life. It is eternal - unless we choose to extinguish it from our hearts during our earthly journey. It is through hope and faith that we keep love alive and active in the here and now.



Columban Fr Peter Woodruff's time in Peru, working alongside those living in poverty.

When I left Peru definitively in 2009 and returned to Australia, settling in Essendon, I was retired from active ministry, but not from life. Like many Australian retirees, I took the opportunity to travel around this vast and beautiful country. Those travels helped me to reflect more deeply on my own land and its stories. They also opened my eyes to the history and ongoing reality of Indigenous Australians.

What I discovered, and continue to reflect on, is how the experience of Indigenous communities here mirrors, in certain ways, the struggles I witnessed in

Peru. Though the scale is different, the root causes are strikingly similar: colonisation, systemic exclusion, cultural suppression, and the lingering effects of historical injustice. The poverty I saw in Peru was material and visible. The wounds among Indigenous Australians are often more hidden - cultural, psychological, and spiritual - but they are no less real.

And yet, what binds these two peoples together is something far more powerful than their suffering - it is their hope. Hope that endures despite oppression. Hope that seeks justice. Hope that calls forth the strength of ancestors, the wisdom of culture, and the vision of a better future for the next generation. This hope, lived out by ordinary people in extraordinary ways, has continually moved me.

I also take heart in the growing desire among many non-Indigenous Australians to walk alongside our First Nations peoples. While the path is often challenging and the political climate uncertain, there are signs of real change. Hope can be seen in new conversations, in acts of truth-telling, in cultural revival, and in the voices of courageous Indigenous leaders - many of whom have inspired the nation.

Among those leaders, two people stand out to me as remarkable beacons of hope: Lowitja O'Donoghue and Patrick Dodson. Their stories are powerful not just because of what they achieved, but because of how they achieved it - with integrity, humility, and steadfast hope.

Lowitja O'Donoghue was born into a world shaped by the brutal policies of assimilation. Taken from her mother at age two, she became part of the Stolen Generations. She did not see her mother again for 33 years. Growing up in institutional care, denied the right to speak her language or know her full heritage, Lowitja endured great pain. But she did not let it define her.

At just sixteen, she began working as a domestic servant, and later as a nursing aide. When she applied to become a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, she was rejected because of her Aboriginal background. Rather than accept this injustice, she challenged it - ultimately winning the support of the South Australian Premier and becoming the first Aboriginal nurse trained at the hospital.

This would be the beginning of a lifetime of leadership. From her role as Director in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to becoming the

inaugural chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), and later addressing the United Nations, Lowitja was a pioneering figure.

In 2015, she launched the Lowitja Institute, dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. She remained a passionate advocate until her passing in 2024 at the age of 91. Through every stage of her life, she embodied the quiet strength of hope.

Patrick Dodson, often called the "father of reconciliation", was born in Broome, WA, and raised in a time when laws forbade interracial families like his. His parents were imprisoned for defying those laws. Orphaned at 13, he and his siblings became wards of the state. Through the intervention of missionaries, Patrick and his brother Mick received scholarships to Monivae College in Victoria.

There, Patrick emerged as a strong leader. He later became the first Aboriginal Catholic priest in Australia. But after years of struggling to reconcile his Aboriginal spirituality with his priestly role, he left ministry and turned his full attention to advocacy.

Patrick played a leading role in the return of Uluru to its traditional owners, chaired the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, and served as Royal Commissioner into Aboriginal deaths in custody. In the political realm, he served as a senator, always committed to bringing forward the voice of his people. A key figure in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Patrick continues to be a moral compass for the nation - even in retirement.

These two figures - Lowitja and Patrick - show us that hope is not simply a wish for better days. Hope is lived, embodied, and acted upon. It speaks truth, demands justice, and draws people together. It challenges unjust systems and inspires new possibilities. Their lives have left a rich heritage, and through them, others have found the courage to rise, to lead, and to dream.

Hope is the quiet but unyielding force that stirs us to believe in something greater than ourselves. It is the path through despair, the light through darkness. In the lives of the poor in Peru, and in the struggle and leadership of Indigenous Australians, I have witnessed the gift of hope again and again. It is, truly, the seed from which justice and peace can grow.

FR PETER WOODRUFF

Columban Fr Peter Woodruff lives in Australia.

KILFENORA'S KOREAN CONNECTION

The year 1974 was a turbulent one for the Catholic Church in South Korea, particularly in the Diocese of Wonju. The country was under a repressive military dictatorship that sought to crush political dissent and restrict the freedoms of ordinary citizens. Church leaders, students, academics, and even ordinary workers were regularly surveilled, interrogated, and, in many cases, imprisoned simply for speaking out.

One of the most courageous voices during this time was that of Bishop Daniel Tji Hak Soun of Wonju. He had long advocated for human rights and dignity, and he did not shy away from publicly condemning the regime's abuses. For this, he was arrested, tried by a military court, and sentenced to eight years in prison for allegedly violating national security laws. His arrest sent a chilling message to others who dared to challenge the government, and his imprisonment became symbolic of the broader oppression facing the Korean people.

At the time, I was working in Korea and had the privilege of knowing and working alongside Bishop Tji. His arrest hit me hard. When I became due for vacation, Cardinal Kim, recognising both the gravity of the situation and the opportunity my travels might afford, encouraged me to go to the United States and seek the support of influential Church leaders there.

During my visit to the United States, I met with three eminent cardinals. Each listened politely as I explained the situation in Korea and pleaded for them to use their influence to advocate for Bishop Tji's release. While they expressed concern, I left with little more than polite assurances. Only the Cardinal Archbishop of New York offered meaningful support. He promised to raise the issue with contacts at the United Nations, which gave me a glimmer of hope.

Still, as I made my way back to Ireland, I couldn't help but feel discouraged. Bishop Tji remained in prison, and despite my efforts, I feared I had accomplished

very little. I knew first-hand the harsh conditions he would be enduring and how isolating such imprisonment could be.

During my vacation in Ireland, I visited the family home of a Columban Sister who was then serving as a medical doctor in a hospital in Mokpo, Korea. Her hometown, Kilfenora in County Clare, is best known for its rich tradition of Irish music - but during that visit, it became the setting for something quite unexpected.

While sitting in the pub owned by the Sister's father, I overheard a conversation in a nearby corner. One of the men had an American accent. Curious, he came over and asked if I were the local priest. I explained that I was a Columban missionary on leave from South Korea, which piqued his interest immediately. He told me that his son had been killed in the Korean War and that he remained deeply invested in Korean affairs.

At the time, I was working in Korea and had the privilege of knowing and working alongside Bishop Tji. His arrest hit me hard.

As we continued speaking, I shared with him the situation facing the Church in Korea, particularly the persecution of those who stood up for justice. I told him about Bishop Tji's arrest and imprisonment. He listened intently. Then he introduced himself as Tady Gleeson. He had been born in Toomevara, County Tipperary, and had emigrated to the United States at seventeen. After working as a docker in the Brooklyn Docks, he attended night school, became a lawyer, and eventually rose to the powerful position of President of the International Longshoremen's Association.

"I have the power to close the docks in Inchon and Pusan," he said, speaking of the two major South Korean port cities. It was a bold statement and not a boastful one - he was revealing the extent of his influence.

Before we parted, he told me he would follow up on the matter when he returned to New York. He also mentioned that he had contacts in the US State

Department and would do what he could to bring attention to the bishop's case. Some weeks later, I received a package from New York. Inside was a signed copy of his autobiography, *Men Along the Shore*. Along with it was a letter he had sent to General Alexander Haig, White House Chief of Staff under President Gerald Ford, as well as a copy of a letter he had written directly to the President. To my great surprise, the package also included a copy of President Ford's reply, in which he assured Mr Gleeson that he would raise the matter of Bishop Tji with the South Korean government during his forthcoming visit.

A few months later, news came through that Bishop Tji had been released. Although his health had deteriorated in prison, his release was greeted with great joy. He returned to a hero's welcome from his people and resumed his ministry with quiet strength and renewed resolve.

This entire episode reminded me of how God can work through the most unexpected encounters. Sometimes, when we least expect it, we meet people whose paths cross with ours for a reason. Kilfenora may seem like an unlikely place to influence events on the other side of the world, but that little village in County Clare became a pivotal part of a greater story.

"I have the power to close the docks in Inchon and Pusan," he said, speaking of the two major South Korean port cities. It was a bold statement and not a boastful one - he was revealing the extent of his influence.

It is a powerful reminder that when we speak up, even to strangers, our words can plant seeds of change. Sometimes, the most unassuming conversations can help move mountains. And sometimes, the hand of God is most visible in the quiet serendipity of human connection.

FR MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

In loving memory of Columban Fr Michael O'Loughlin who lived and worked in Ireland, Korea and the USA.



MISSION WORLD

COMMUNICATIONS AND WORLD MISSION



I would like to explore what Pope Francis has said about communications over recent years, because I believe that his reflections speak to the challenges facing all of us as missionary disciples of Jesus in today's world. Each year on the World Day of Social Communications, Francis would issue a message. The theme of these messages were *encountering persons where and how they are (2021)*, *hearing with the ear of the heart (2022)*, and *speaking to the heart (2023)*.

In 2021 Francis challenged journalists and news writers to meet people where they are or, as he put it, "to hit the street". He thanked journalists for their courage in taking the risk to meet people "how and where they are". However, internet and social media have raised the problem of mis- or disinformation. News information and images can be easily manipulated for a variety of reasons. But Francis says, "All of us are to be witnesses of the truth: to go, to see and to share."

In 2022 Francis said Jesus calls his disciples to evaluate the quality of their listening. "Take heed then how you hear" (Lk 8:18). He spoke about the patience required to truly listen.

As an example of the importance of listening, Francis turned to the issue of migration. "The reality of forced migration is also a complex issue, and no one has a ready-made prescription for solving it. I repeat that, in

order to overcome prejudices about migrants and to melt the hardness of our hearts, we should try to listen to their stories. Give each of them a name and a story."

In 2023 Francis moved on from the theme of "to come and see" and "to listen" to the theme of "speaking with the heart". This begins often enough with the experience of friendly conversations. Such encounters help people to "peacefully reflect and interpret with a critical yet always respectful spirit, the reality in which they live." Then going on to the task of communicating what one has heard, Francis quotes from St John Henry Newman who said, "In order to speak well, it is enough to love well". This shows that for Newman, "communication should never be reduced to something artificial, to a marketing strategy, as we might say nowadays, but is rather a reflection of the soul, the visible surface of a nucleus of love that is invisible to the eye."

Communication lies at the heart of World Mission. Christian websites abound on the internet because it is one of the more effective means by which we communicate to today's world our messages and stories. What Pope Francis is saying to us is that we must ensure that our messages and stories come from lived experience. In other words, we can truly say that we have been there and learnt how to listen patiently to people and to listen from the heart. Having done so, the more difficult challenge is to then ensure that our message reflects our deep love for people, our faith in Jesus Christ whose call is to "come and see", and our courage to speak the truth.

FR TOM ROUSE

Columban Fr Tom Rouse is the Regional Councillor for Aotearoa-New Zealand.

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE FRANCIS

August - For mutual coexistence: Let us pray that societies where coexistence seems more difficult might not succumb to the temptation of confrontation for ethnic, political, religious or ideological reasons.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES Crossword puzzle

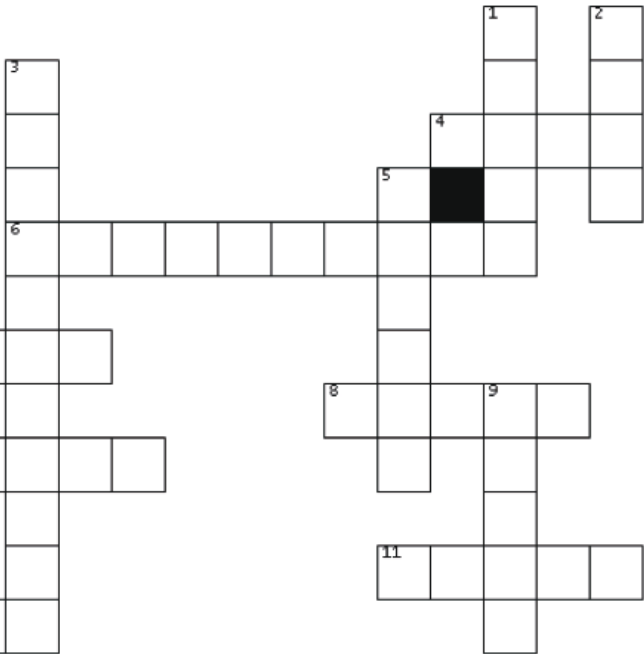
SCAN QR CODE to read the August 2025 Columban Calendar Art Guide and complete the crossword puzzle.

ACROSS

- 4. Transparent cloth covering her hair, breaking with medieval tradition.
- 6. Feast celebrated on August 15, in honour of the Virgin.
- 7. Month dedicated to special devotion to the Virgin.
- 8. Florentine painter of the Holy Family scene.
- 10. Detailed architectural backdrop in the artwork.
- 11. Orientalised fabric binding the Virgin's flowing hair.
- 12. Ancient city referenced in the painting's background.

DOWN

- 1. Title given to the Virgin in Heaven.
- 2. Embroidery thread used in her elegant Renaissance drapery.
- 3. Artistic period in which Lippi worked.
- 5. Title given to the mother of Christ in religious devotion.
- 9. Pre-Christian elements symbolically cast off in the painting.



AUGUST

ANSWERS:
ACROSS: 4. veil, 6. Assumption, 7. August, 8. Lippi, 10. cityscape, 11. scarf, 12. Rome
DOWN: 1. queen, 2. gold, 3. Renaissance, 5. Virgin, 9. pagan

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'Do what you can' Bishop Edward J Galvin



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