



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

THE FAR EAST

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Cover photo: Children from St Bernadette's Children's Centre happily spend time playing together. Photo: Fr Tim Mulroy SSC

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ONE EARTH, ONE HUMANITY

Never in my wildest imagination did it cross my mind that accepting an invitation from the Vatican would put me in harm's way – but it did! Late in 2025, Pope Leo appointed me a Consultor to the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. On January 7, 2026, I was invited to Rome to attend my first meeting with the Commission in early March.

My flight from Sydney to Dubai on February 27, was long and uneventful. I transited through the airport without any trouble. About an hour into the February 28 flight from Dubai to Rome, the pilot announced, "Israel and the USA have just commenced hostilities with Iran. Our flight is being diverted west to avoid the conflict zone." The passengers remained silent, absorbing the impact of this announcement.

Normally, the Middle East is criss-crossed with flights from east to west, north to south and every compass point in between, as people travel to and from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific. Screenshots from that day show a flurry of flights – including the one I was on – skirting around the Middle East. There were no planes in the airspace over Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It was the conflict zone.

More recently, NASA's Artemis II mission has shown us photographs of Earth taken from space. They are stunning. They show our blue-green gem of a planet floating against the vast, inky blackness of space. It looks tiny and fragile, wrapped in a thin blanket of atmosphere and clouds. What is most striking is that there are no countries, no nations, no borders. Unlike the February 27 image of flight paths around the Middle East, there are conflict zones between people of different nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, or languages. The world is one. Seas connect the land continents. We are all interconnected. We belong together. We are one.

These images of the one Earth provide profound spiritual and religious messages. Firstly, all human beings share a common humanity. The differences of race, nationality, culture and language enrich and enhance our shared humanity. Our diversity is a blessing, not a curse. No one is better than any other. All are equal in dignity. Each person must be respected, protected and cherished. Let there be no division, hatred, enmity, conflict, or war. Let us live together as sisters and brothers. Let there be peace on earth.

Secondly, we humans belong to the earth. We are fashioned from the earth - "You are dust and unto dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). It is this flesh that the Word assumed in the incarnation, that rose in Christ and is ascended into heaven, preparing the way for all of us. And not just humans, but all living creatures emerged from the waters or the lands that make up earth (Gen 1:20-25). Science teaches us how this occurred, but faith teaches that all things come from God and will return to God.

Thirdly, humans belong among the creatures of the earth, not above them. We are not to dominate or subjugate them, but to care for and nurture them. We are all interconnected in a web of life and we are mutually dependent on one another. Humans are pre-eminent in our spiritual faculties. However, this does not give us an excuse to exploit or abuse other creatures, but rather makes us all the more responsible to care for them. This includes conserving the lands, seas and air, for we all depend on them for our survival. We must care for our common home. We have no Planet B!

As we contemplate the photos of our earthly home, let us give praise and thanks to God, the Creator and Redeemer. Let us commit ourselves to fostering peace and justice for all peoples, the flourishing of all creatures and a sustainable life for generations to come. "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Lk 2:14)

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Regional Director of Oceania





DIOCESE OF MYITKYINA CELEBRATES LAUDATO SI' WEEK

This year, the Diocese of Myitkyina in Myanmar has celebrated *Laudato Si'* Week in a special way because the year marks the tenth anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

The newly ordained Bishop John La Sam has asked us: "Our land and God's creation is crying - do you hear it crying?" He invites everyone, especially the Church leaders and members, to do three things:

- To educate our communities about ecological responsibility.
- To promote simpler, more sustainable lifestyles.
- To nurture a spirituality of creation that deepens our relationship with God, humanity and the cosmos.

In response and with the assistance of the Justice and Peace Commission and Radio Veritas Asia (Kachin), we have posted four videos on the RVA Kachin Facebook page. The theme is "Biodiversity and Biodiversity Loss". Our posts have accumulated 22,800 views.

Kachin State is rich in natural resources. Human activities, such as mining, logging and banana plantations, have long flourished in the area, but they have also led to environmental degradation. To make matters worse, a catastrophic flood in July 2024 destroyed many properties and displaced hundreds of people. The combination of environmental degradation and floods also displaces animals and reduces biodiversity.

With biodiversity the theme of this year's *Laudato Si'* celebration, we invited a project officer from Fauna



St Luke College Catechist 2nd year students, question and Answer section.

and Flora International, Mr Zawng Lum, to help us establish a community-led biodiversity conservation program at the Imau Bum National Park in Northern Myanmar. This program is the first in Myanmar to be gazetted through a comprehensive consultation process of indigenous people.

That same week, we held the first Student Environmental Leadership Camp. The themes were Leadership, Environment and Community. During the camp, members of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina, aged 14 to 18, learned about Catholic Social Teaching, the See Judge Act method, *Laudato Si'*, Biodiversity and Solid Waste Management.

We also held a two-day workshop for 54 student catechists of the St Luke Socio-Pastoral College. Catechists are vital community and church leaders in the diocese. During the workshop, the student catechists learned practical ways to respond to Pope Francis's call to hear the cry of the Poor and the cry of the Earth. In the workshop, we highlighted the Church's role to remind its leaders and members of our need for individual and communal "ecological conversion".

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis warns that relying too much on mineral extraction without due regard to the environment will ultimately harm us and other creatures. He invites us to live more simply and urges

The Kachins, one of Myanmar's many indigenous peoples, love to sing and dance. Legend has it that the Manau traditional dance was taught to the Kachins by the birds and animals. Little wonder they have such a strong connection with the land and creation!

us to raise our prophetic voices. He says: Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin. People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilize and to demand – peacefully, but firmly – that appropriate and urgently needed measures be taken. I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth. (Pope Francis, July 9, 2015)

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So, when the workshop ended, the students gathered in a circle for a community prayer and a traditional song. As we sang together, we were reminded that God is the creator of everything. And from the very beginning, everything was good.

We must adore and praise God the Creator, for we are all God's creatures.

FR KURT ZION PALA

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.



Closing prayer led by Columban Lay Missionary Michael Javier and Sr Roi San FMM.

MISSIONARY JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN BUT NEVER ALONE



Columban Frs Teakare Betero, Martin Koroiciri and Amini Ravuwai during their days as seminarians in South America, 2016. (left to right)

On the last journey of my initial formation in Fiji, I was privileged to share a couple of moments with my fellow brother in mission, Fr Amini Ravuwai, who had been two years behind me in the seminary. Like me, he too had a strong conviction to serve as a missionary.

At one point during our two-year First Missionary Assignment as seminarians, we were sent to serve in a summer mission in the north of Lima, Peru, in the middle of the desert in a small village called Caceres near the city of Chimbote. After a long day's work of visiting the families in that area, we came back to the lodging house and sat on the street overlooking the endless mountains of desert land.

We sat there for a while, enjoying the cool breeze and the beautiful sunset, tired and satisfied with the day's work, when Amini turned to me and said, "Can you imagine how far we have come? From the day we accepted the invitation to serve our wonderful God and walk into the unknown, we have come from the tropical islands of Fiji to the desert mountains of Peru." This reminded me of Joshua 1:9, "I hereby command you; be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." It was there that I came to this

profound experience of what it truly means to follow God into this beautiful journey into the unknown.

I was ordained in 2018 and sent to serve in Chile, while Fr Amini was ordained in 2020 and sent to Peru. We would occasionally meet when I visited Lima. We would share both the joyful and the challenging moments we experienced on our mission journey, which was very encouraging and life-giving for both of us.

In May – June 2024, we had our once-every-six-years Columban General Assembly in Lima. In informal conversations during the Assembly, we heard that some of us might have to leave our current places of mission to work in other countries and start from scratch, learning new languages and new cultures. I found the prospect confronting because it had taken me a long time to understand even half of what people were talking about in Chile. The Spanish they speak there is rapid!

I feared what this might entail for me, so I called Fr Amini and asked him, "Brother, if you were told that for the necessity of mission, you had to leave Peru and serve in another country, learn a new language and restart from scratch, would you do it?" He asked me what this meant and why I was asking him, to which I responded, "Just answer the question from the heart."

After a long pause, he finally answered, "I have followed Him this far and after all that He has given me, I am willing to follow Him anywhere." I wiped the tears from my eyes and went back to the Assembly with my heart affirmed.

In September of 2024, my brother was diagnosed with cancer, which surprised and worried me, so I called him and asked how he felt. He said, "There are a lot of things going on in my mind, but one question that resounds stronger in me is: " 'Why? Why me, why now? I am only beginning my mission. Four years on the journey and God has given me this.'" I told him I couldn't answer his question, but I would pray about it and call him every day to see if he had found the answer.

On January 9, 2025, my brother breathed his last and passed away. He never told me the answer to his

question. I kept praying about it, though and for the first anniversary of his death, I decided to write a song about him.

It took a whole year to put the words on paper, as the song revolved around the question that my brother had asked me. After so much discernment and prayer and with the help of Fr Napa Tavo and Fr Iowane Gukibau (my fellow Columban brother priests on mission in Peru), we finally managed to compose the song. The hardest part to form was the chorus, but it was worth it as it answered my brother's question, or so we believe.

The first part of the chorus to the song goes: Why me? Why now? I've just been anointed. Why here? Why now? Is all I am seeking. And the second part of the chorus is what we would imagine God's answering him to be: It is I who has called you, from the womb. It is I who has sent you, to be my voice to the poor.

After all the roller coaster of emotions and this journey of accompanying my brother in mission, I realised that following Christ in mission to the unknown is a sacrifice and a life-giving journey to serve the poor, to laugh with them, to cry with them, and, if necessary, to die with them.

Columban Fr Tony Coney mentioned in his reflection at the cemetery before we finally placed Fr Amini's body to rest, that Fr Amini gave his life to the mission until his final breath and was willing to be buried in his land of mission. To which someone in the mourning crowd voiced, "And now he is part of us as well."

In the silence that followed his burial, as the desert wind carried the last prayers into the evening sky of Peru, I began to understand what my brother had lived so faithfully. The question "Why me? Why now?" was never truly about timing, nor about fairness. It was about trust. And trust, I have learned, is the deepest language of mission.

When we first sat on that dusty street in Cáceres, dreaming aloud about how far God had brought us - from Fiji to the deserts of Peru - we could not have imagined how far "wherever you go" would truly lead. Not just across oceans and continents, but into suffering, surrender and ultimately into love poured out completely. My brother followed Him this far. And in the end, he followed Him all the way. His life became the answer he was searching for. He was called from the womb. He was sent to be a voice to

the poor. And even in his illness, even in his dying, he remained that voice - preaching not from the pulpit, but from a hospital bed, not with grand homilies, but with quiet endurance and unwavering faith.

Standing at his grave, when someone said, "And now he is part of us as well," I felt the truth of those words settle deeply within me. Mission had taken him from Fiji to Peru, but love had rooted him there forever. He was no longer a foreign missionary. He was a brother of the land - a seed planted in the soil he had come to serve. And perhaps that is the mystery of this journey into the unknown: we never walk it alone. Not when we first say yes. Not when we are sent to new lands. Not when we face fears of beginning again. And not even when we pass through death.

The Lord who commanded us to be strong and courageous has remained faithful. He was there in the desert sunsets, in the laughter shared after long days of visitation, in the trembling uncertainty of new assignments and in the hospital room where my brother wrestled with his final question.

I still do not claim to understand fully why it was him, or why it was then. But I know this: his life was not cut short. It was completed. Completed in fidelity. Completed in love. Completed in mission. And as I continue my own journey - into new places, new languages, new uncertainties - I carry his words in my heart: "I have followed Him this far ... I am willing to follow Him anywhere." Mission is a journey into the unknown, but never alone. Because the One who calls us walks before us. And sometimes, He also walks beside us in the life of a brother who shows us how to say yes - until the very end.

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FR MARTIN KOROICIRI

Columban Fr Martin Koroiciri lives and works in Chile.

REFLECTION

THE GIFT OF GENEROSITY



“The significant point for Fr Tom was that this plain Filipino girl, who never struggled with the definition of love, exemplified it by giving him one of the few things she had in life.”

These words appeared in a newspaper column in the United States. The writer had been deeply moved by a story shared in a homily by Fr Tom Convery and she wanted her readers to experience the same insight.

The story itself was simple. Many years ago, in Masinloc, a small town in the Philippines, Fr Tom was hearing confessions. A young girl approached the confessional and gently parted the curtain. In her hand, she held a kaymito, a star apple. She asked him if he would like it.

“Yes,” he replied, “if you want to give it, I would enjoy it very much.” She placed the fruit in his hand, turned and quietly walked away.

No more was said.

That child has probably long forgotten the moment. Fr Tom continued his missionary work in many places.

Yet, years later, he would reflect on that simple act as something extraordinary. The girl came from a place of real poverty. Her family had very little and there were few prospects for change. But that was not the point.

The point was that she understood love, not as something to be explained, but as something to be given. In that moment, she became a giver. Her gesture reminds me of another experience from my own time in mission.

On one occasion, two men walked in from a remote barrio to accompany me back to their village for their annual fiesta. One carried my suitcase, containing the chalice and vestments for Mass. The other carried a second bag. We walked for eight hours through rough terrain. By the time we arrived, the bags were heavy and we were exhausted.

When we finally opened the second bag, I discovered what they had carried all that way. Inside were a few cans of soft drink, a couple of bottles of beer, some sardines and a jar of marmalade. It was all for me.

One of those men had walked into town the day before, stayed overnight and then walked back again carrying those items, simply so that the priest might

ENTER NOW

have what they thought he would enjoy. I doubt they have thought about it since. I have never forgotten it.

Anyone who has spent time among people who have little will recognise this pattern. They share what they have. Often, they give from what they need themselves. The challenge for the one receiving is not simply to accept the gift, but to receive it with humility and grace.

Yet a deeper question lingers. Can we respond with the same generosity?

Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said that the Good News is preached to the poor. It is not only so that they may receive it, but so that, in their own way, they may preach it back to us. Their lives become a living Gospel, one that challenges our assumptions and stretches our capacity to give.

In moments like these, something of God becomes visible.

When generosity is shared, both the giver and the receiver are touched by grace. There is a quiet recognition that love is not measured by how much we have, but by how freely we give. It also helps us understand a familiar phrase often heard from those returning from mission: "I received far more than I ever gave."

The Gospel has a way of turning things upside-down. In a world that often measures worth by possessions and success, the poor remind us of a different truth. They reveal that even the smallest gift, given with love, carries a richness beyond measure. And perhaps that is the lesson we are all invited to learn.

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FR BRENDAN O'SULLIVAN

Columban Fr Brendan O'Sullivan lives and works in the United States.



LIVING WATER

This September, students from primary and secondary schools across Australia, Fiji and New Zealand are invited to creatively share their response to Ezekiel's vision of living waters by entering the Columban Season of Creation Competition.

Students can submit artwork, video or poetry on the theme of "God's living water." Students can also submit essays that answer ONE of the following questions:

1. Why is it so important for us to keep water clean? How does clean water affect not just human, but the whole of creation?
2. As young people, what are some simple things you can start doing to take care of God's creation and in particular the earth's oceans and waterways?
3. What does it look like for humans to become a "channel" of God's living water? In other words, how can we help bring healing and reconnect with creation instead of harming it?

Enter submissions by September 1, 2026!

May God's living waters renew your spirit to care for creation and our common home!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO WATCH What is the theme for Season of Creation 2026 Video **SCAN QR**



WHEN RICE IS SPRINKLED



Columban Fr Louie Ybanez officiates at the wedding in a village in interior Sindh, seated opposite the bride and groom, facing the *Rupwo* or wedding canopy, which is adorned with colourful paper buntings. The community gathers around the canopy, forming a circle of witness and support, while the women serve as the choir, chanting traditional hymns in the Parkari language.

One of the great privileges of missionary life is the opportunity to encounter cultures profoundly different from one's own. In interior Sindh, one immediately senses a heritage that is both ancient and intimately shaped by the land itself. This culture is not merely observed - it is felt in the rhythms of daily life, in the symbols people cherish and in the rituals that carry meaning far deeper than religious identity alone.

During the winter months - from November to February - the Parkari Kohli community celebrates the wedding season with great joy and festivity. Having officiated at countless weddings, I have come to appreciate how profoundly symbolic these celebrations are. What strikes me most is how each

gesture and ritual reflects a deep sense of communal interconnectedness - linking families not only to one another, but also to the land and its harvest that sustains their lives.

In Parkari Kohli weddings, the elements carry rich symbolic meanings. The ceremony uses husked coconut, which alludes to fertility, cloves, cardamom, dried dates and Gurr or hardened sugar. Rice, a staple of the harvest, is used by mothers when they offer their blessings to the couple - a gesture of nurturance, fruitfulness and continuity. In an enculturated Christian marriage, these cultural symbols are reverently preserved and given renewed depth.

The priest, too, blesses the couple by sprinkling rice, affirming both tradition and faith. The Bible is placed alongside these elements and, as the vows are proclaimed, the bride and groom rest their hands upon it - invoking their commitment to live according to the values of the Gospel. The vows unfold through a series of symbolic gestures. Among them is the *Phira*, in which the bride and groom circumambulate three times - walk around the sacred fire and the

Photos: Fr Louie Ybanez SSC

cross positioned at the centre of the marriage canopy, known as the *Rupwo*. This canopy, often adorned with rice grains, sindhur powder and glimmering decorations, becomes a sacred space where culture and Christian faith meet, intertwining tradition, community and covenant.

In many cultures - particularly in the West - marriage is understood primarily as a personal decision between two individuals. In Pakistan, marriage is far more than a private commitment; it is a deeply rooted family affair. Within tribal communities, especially, it becomes a profoundly communal event, marked by the active participation and blessing of the entire community. The commitment binds families, which is essential to survival in such a challenging environment.

I often find myself filled with quiet awe as I witness the many rituals and practices unfold - so simple, yet so deeply meaningful. No excessive and elaborate activities, no restless pursuit of extravagance. Everything is marked by restraint, shaped more by tradition than by display.

If anything is abundant, it is not luxury but life itself - the rhythmic chants of the women rising into the air, the unrestrained joy that accompanies the festivity, the careful attention to cultural customs and the generous blessings offered by each person to the couple. In these moments, I sense that what sustains the celebration is not material grandeur but the richness of shared faith, adherence to tradition and community.

As I reflect more deeply on these wedding symbols, I cannot help but see how intimately they are bound to the land itself. The husked coconut, the rice grains, the cloves and cardamom, the dried dates and hardened sugar - all arise from the soil, from seasons of sowing and reaping, from human hands that depend on the rhythms of nature. Even the fire at the centre of the Phira and the decorated *Rupwo* or wedding canopy speak of elements drawn from the earth. A wedding, in this sense, is not only a covenant between two people; it is a quiet acknowledgment of dependence on creation.

Yet in the arid plains of interior Sindh, environmental fragility is never far from consciousness. Drought, water scarcity, soil degradation and climate uncertainties increasingly threaten the very harvests that these symbols celebrate.



At the start of the wedding rite, rice is blessed as a gift and prayer. After the vows, it is gently sprinkled over the couple, symbolising fertility, abundance and a fruitful life together.

When rice is scarce, when crops fail, when the land yields less than it once did, the symbols used in marriage rites take on a deeper expression. They are no longer simply signs of abundance; they become prayers for sustainability, resilience and hope.

When I sprinkle the rice grains, I do more than a gesture of blessing. It is coupled with a prayer that quietly carries an ecological meaning - a reminder that every prayer for fruitfulness is also a prayer for the land that makes such fruitfulness possible. They remind the community that human love and commitment are inseparable from caring for the earth. If marriage binds two lives together in fidelity, it also implicitly calls the community to fidelity towards the land that sustains them. In blessing the couple with rice and invoking fruitfulness, the community is, perhaps unknowingly, expressing a longing for harmony between human relationships and the fragile environment on which all relationships depend.

FR LOUIE YBAÑEZ

Columban Fr Louie Ybañez lives and works in Pakistan.

THE FORGIVENESS AND THE HEALING

For the past six years, I have run the Year of Spiritual Formation for the Columban seminarians in Manila. During the winter break of 2023, I visited the PREDA Centre in Olongapo, northern Philippines, together with the students. PREDA stands for People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance.

This centre carries out various ministries, one of which is to run a shelter for boys and girls under 20 years old who have suffered physical violence or sexual abuse. In many cases, the perpetrators are their own fathers, relatives, or neighbours. Fr Shay Cullen, a Columban missionary, first founded this centre in 1974 to protect and heal such children and it continues to function effectively to this day.

The centre operates separate shelters for boys and girls. We first visited the shelter for girls, where about forty children were being cared for and protected.

After giving us a thirty-minute introduction, Fr Cullen guided us to the emotional therapy room on the second floor. When we entered, I saw that the room was about 33 square metres, with thick mattresses covering the floor. The walls and ceiling were lined with sound-absorbing materials, designed to keep all sounds from escaping. It felt as though no matter how much one shouted inside, no one outside could hear.

Fr Cullen explained that once a week, with the help of professional counsellors, the children are encouraged to express openly the sexual and physical abuse they have suffered. During these sessions, the children sometimes scream, cry, pull their hair, or hit the walls with their fists or feet.

After releasing their anger and pain in such an active way, they gradually begin to talk about what happened to them and start sharing their traumatic experiences little by little.

Of course, accompanying them through that process is extremely painful and difficult to watch, but Fr Cullen said that it is the first and most essential step towards

true healing and that is why he chooses to stay and be present in those moments.

He also said that for these children to fully lay down the immense pain and trauma they have endured, it may take an entire lifetime.

After hearing his explanation, I walked slowly along the walls of the therapy room and closed my eyes. Then, in my mind, I could almost hear the cries of the children, see their faces twisted in anguish, pounding the walls and the floor with their fists. The images struck my heart vividly and tears welled up in my eyes. An overwhelming wave of anger and sorrow surged within me.

Unable to stay inside any longer, I stepped outside. There, in the courtyard, I saw the girls dancing joyfully to some music.

They looked just like any other children you might see anywhere - laughing, clapping, teasing one another when someone made a mistake. Watching them, my heart grew heavy and conflicted. It was hard to imagine that these same smiling, lovely children, when they entered the therapy room, would release such deep wounds, fears and anger.

After visiting both the boys' and girls' shelters, we gathered for a time of reflection and prayer before going to bed. But that night, I could not sleep. My heart felt heavy and my mind kept returning to what I had seen in the emotional therapy room - the children's cries, the pain they released, the suffering they had endured.

As I stayed with those thoughts, I began to see not only the wounded children but also their families, relatives and acquaintances connected to them. I realised that many of these perpetrators were themselves also victims - people who had once suffered similar abuse as children from their own parents or others.

Then I was struck by the horror of it: a cycle of evil perpetuated through generations, passed down to the most vulnerable - young girls and boys who bear the consequences of unhealed wounds.

When Jesus said, "Love your enemies" and taught us to do good to those who hate, curse, or mistreat us, He was, in a sense, inviting us to recognise that even perpetrators may once have been victims. A victim



Columban Frs Taemoon Kwon (left - right), Shay Cullen, Columban seminarians and Columban Sr Minah Seo.

whose wounds are never healed can later become a perpetrator. In this sense, when Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," it was not only a call to compassion but also a warning about the continuity of sin and an invitation to break that destructive cycle.

Of course, the horrific acts committed by the abusers against these children must never be hidden or ignored. On the contrary, the wounds of the victims must be continually voiced and we must all weep together with them. Society must never demand forgiveness from these children who have endured such tremendous suffering.

For this reason, I believe that the cries and screams of the children in the therapy room are actually the first courageous and sacred step towards breaking that chain of evil passed down through generations. To listen to those cries without turning away, to stay with them until the end and to help bring their pain to light in the community - I realised how deeply valuable such acts are.

The Church is not meant for the powerful or the privileged. It is for the weak, the wounded and the poor. We must create a Church where their cries and their struggles are heard ever more loudly and more widely. Only then will the destructive continuity of evil lose its power.

Some people may feel uncomfortable exposing the dark corners of society, thinking that it only makes

things worse. But truth-seeking must go hand in hand with justice and mercy. These three together - truth, justice and mercy - are the key to building true peace.

Justice or mercy without truth only leads to a false peace. In reality, truth does not provoke revenge but instead leads to reconciliation and forgiveness. Therefore, true forgiveness does not mean forgetting.

Of course, when we confront our wounds - the truth of our pain - it can bring greater suffering and conflict, just as the children in the therapy room cry out wildly when they face their trauma.

But healing requires that we first acknowledge we are wounded and from that awareness arises a deep longing for wholeness.

That longing is born only when we look directly at our pain and allow ourselves to grieve. We must be able to cry out, "I am hurt." Or "I am in pain." Silence and avoidance do not help.

Therefore, we must acknowledge that conflict is an inevitable part of true forgiveness - we must endure it. Only when we face that conflict fully can we take the first step towards genuine healing.

FR TAEMOON KWON

Columban Fr Taemoon Kwon lives and works in Korea.
Photo: Fr Taemoon Kwon SSC



A SAFE PLACE TO HEAL AND GROW

St Bernadette's Residential Home, Peru.

In the bustling district of San Martín de Porres, Peru, where many families face poverty, instability and social challenges, a quiet but powerful mission has been unfolding for nearly three decades. St Bernadette's Children's Centres, established and supported by the Columban missionaries, have become a place of refuge, protection and hope for some of the most vulnerable children in the community.

What began in 1997 as a simple children's day centre has grown into a comprehensive Columban mission dedicated to the protection of children's rights and the restoration of dignity for those affected by abuse and neglect. Over 29 years, St Bernadette's Civil Association has developed a deeply integrated response to the realities faced by children, one that reflects the Columban commitment to justice, peace and the care of the most vulnerable.

At the heart of this mission is the Children's Day Centre, a welcoming and open space where children from the surrounding neighbourhoods can come freely. Here, they find more than just activities. They find safety.

Children gather to play, study, create and simply be children, often for the first time in an environment free from fear. Staff members, inspired by Columban values and trained to recognise the signs of abuse and distress, provide not only supervision but attentive care and protection.

When concerns arise, the response is immediate and compassionate. Each case is referred to the Children's Defence Desk, a cornerstone of the Association's work. Through this service, children are supported by qualified psychologists and families are engaged with sensitivity and care.

The Defence Desk also assists those families struggling with poverty and exclusion, helping them access identity documents, enrol their children in school and secure essential supports such as child maintenance.

For children who have experienced abuse, the journey towards healing can be long and complex. The Defence Desk walks alongside them, offering legal accompaniment and ensuring that cases are properly

Photo: Fr Tony Coney SSC

Every contribution directly supports children who have already endured more than any child should.

reported and followed through. In doing so, it not only protects individual children but also contributes to the Columban mission of transforming unjust structures that allow abuse to persist. Over the years, thousands of cases have been addressed through this vital service.

As the needs of the community became clearer, St Bernadette's expanded its mission. Two additional centres were established to respond to the deeper and often hidden wounds carried by children.

One of these is a Residential Rehabilitation Home for child victims of sexual abuse. For 22 years, this programme has provided a safe and structured environment where children can begin the difficult process of healing. Currently, around 30 children live in the Home. Each child receives not only food, shelter and education, but also specialised psychological care to help them process trauma and rebuild their sense of self-worth. Although Government authorities refer these children, the responsibility for their daily care falls largely on the Centre, sustained through Columban support and the generosity of benefactors.

Alongside this is a school reintegration programme, established 19 years ago, for children at risk of expulsion or dropout. Many of these children come from backgrounds marked by disadvantage, instability or trauma. Through tailored support in literacy and numeracy, combined with psychosocial care and strong family engagement, the programme helps children rediscover confidence in learning. In this way, the Columban mission promotes not only education but dignity and opportunity for every child.

Over time, it has become increasingly clear that responding to abuse is not enough. Prevention is essential. This insight gave rise to the Schools Outreach Programme, the fourth pillar of St Bernadette's mission.

Through this initiative, the Association works directly within local schools, offering training for teachers, parents and students on child protection and the rights of the child. The programme is also establishing child protection teams within schools, empowering communities to take responsibility for safeguarding their children. This reflects the Columban vision of working in partnership with local communities to bring about lasting change.

Today, St Bernadette's stands as far more than a single project. It is a living expression of the Columban missionary spirit, a multi-faceted mission working to ensure that every child has access to justice, education and a life free from violence.

The impact is profound. Hundreds of children have been rehabilitated from the trauma of sexual abuse and returned to families better equipped to protect them. Hundreds more have been guided back into education, given a renewed opportunity to shape their future. Thousands of families have received support, guidance and accompaniment in navigating systems that often feel beyond their reach.

Yet the need remains urgent. The Residential Home continues to carry a heavy responsibility. With no ongoing Government support for the children's daily needs, St Bernadette's relies on the generosity of donors to provide food, education, healthcare and therapeutic care. Every contribution directly supports children who have already endured more than any child should.

In a world where the dignity of the most vulnerable is too often overlooked, St Bernadette's Children's Centres offer a different story, a story of compassion, resilience and hope, rooted in the Columban mission to bring justice, healing and dignity to all.

FR TONY CONEY

Columban Fr Tony Coney lives and works in Peru.



Children from St Bernadette's Children's Centre happily spend time playing together. Photo: Fr Tim Mulroy SSC

WHEN RAIN BECOMES A BLESSING



In many places in the Philippines, rivers remain a source of daily life for washing, cleaning, and gathering together as a community.

As a missionary in Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, I came to understand in a deeply personal way how difficult life can be without something as basic as water. What I once considered ordinary, I began to recognise as a daily struggle for many.

During my first years there, a woman told me that “rain was a blessing”. At the time, I didn’t fully understand. But later, I witnessed their reality. When it rained, families rushed to collect water for bathing, washing clothes and cleaning their homes. However, for drinking and cooking, they still had to source water from afar and pay for it. Their water system functioned only once a week and during those few hours, they had to store enough to last the rest of the week.

One of the moments that stayed with me most was seeing the children’s reaction to the rain. They ran outside, laughing and bathing under the falling water.

At first, I didn’t understand their joy. But over time, I realised that for them, rain meant freedom - the chance to bathe without limits. What seemed ordinary to me was, for them, a moment of pure happiness.

Not every family can afford a water connection in their homes. Some walk to the nearest river to wash clothes, clean kitchen utensils and carry water back. I remember watching them balance heavy containers as they made their way home. Even when the water wasn’t clean, they were grateful simply to have it. In places without a nearby river, they built wells. These wells became more than just a source of water - they became gathering places. Families washed clothes and bathed together, talking and laughing as they worked. I realised that water, while a necessity, also connects people and creates a sense of community.

Sometimes I joined them to collect water or sat by the riverside while they did their laundry. We shared stories from our lives and spoke about our meetings. Washing clothes could take hours, but for me it became a beautiful experience - time filled with simplicity, connection and meaning.

Pope Francis reminds us that access to safe drinking water is a basic human right, calling its absence a “disgrace to humanity”. Still, many cannot afford to have water in their homes - or even nearby.



Clean water is a precious gift and brings hope to communities each day.

During my house visits, I saw children suffering from skin infections and other health problems. When I asked their parents, I learned that these illnesses were often caused by unclean water and that many families could not afford medicine.

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What I witnessed is not just one story; it is the reality for millions of people. And it leaves us with a question: if we truly understand the value of water, can we remain indifferent to those who struggle to have it?

These experiences changed me. They opened both my eyes and my heart. Water is no longer something I use without thinking - it is something I now see as precious, fragile and deeply connected to human dignity. Water is life and yet not everyone has access to it.

ANA FLORES

Columban lay missionary Ana Flores lives and works in the Philippines. Photos: Ana Flores

ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

COLUMBAN VOCATIONS

Do you have a dream of doing some service that is pleasing to God and good for God’s struggling people? Is your faith important to you? Could God be calling you to be a missionary priest or a lay missionary?

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ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

A PATH OF HOPE AND HEALING FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Launching the Mental Health Program in Juárez, Mexico, in partnership with the Humanitarian Health Initiative for the Border (ISHF), supporting migrants with care, dignity, hope and compassionate accompaniment. Photo: Fr Alvaro Martinez SSC

Today, we give thanks to God as we take an important step in our pastoral and humanitarian mission: starting the Mental Health Program. This initiative comes from our deep commitment to the dignity, life and hope of migrants. In a world shaped by forced displacement, inequality and vulnerability, this program is a real sign of care, support and love for others.

The city of Juárez in Mexico has welcomed thousands of migrants searching for a safe place to rebuild their lives. At the Columban Ministry of the Border, we support them by meeting basic and spiritual needs. Through our work, we have seen that mental health is essential for people of all ages to join a new community and look to the future with hope.

We are very grateful for our year-long partnership with the Humanitarian Health Initiative for the Border (ISHF). This group of health professionals, guided by

compassion and a commitment to social justice and human rights, has helped us support migrant's physical and mental health. Their involvement makes our mission stronger. It helps us care for people more completely, knowing that mental health is key to rebuilding lives.

Migrants bring with them stories shaped by pain, loss, uprooting, uncertainty and often violence from their home countries or during their journey. These experiences leave unseen marks that affect their emotions, self-worth and hopes for the future. As a faith community, we know that healing the heart and mind is just as important as caring for the body. Jesus showed compassion to those who suffered, looked at them with kindness, listened without judging, restored their dignity and gave them hope.

We are happy to welcome the professionals joining our Columban Team. Each brings valuable experience from different organisations and a caring, professional approach to working with people on the move. They will focus on group support, as well as educational and community activities that build relationships, improve daily life and encourage resilience, mutual help and a sense of belonging.

We have also set up a clear plan for individual psychological care. Each professional can work with up to five people in ongoing therapy sessions, usually lasting 8 to 12 sessions, with the option to extend if needed. This support aims to provide emotional help, tools to handle trauma and a path towards healing.

Our program is a seed of hope planted in a time of pain and uncertainty. We believe that with professional help, solidarity and our faith, we can support deep healing and change. We always remember that every migrant is sacred, carries God's image and deserves to live with dignity, peace and hope at every step of their journey.

Jesus showed compassion to those who suffered, looked at them with kindness, listened without judging, restored their dignity and gave them hope.

FR ALVARO MARTINEZ

Columban Fr Alvaro Martinez lives and works at the U.S./Mexico border.

GOD OF NEW BEGINNINGS!

After I finished my term as the Columban Lay Missionary Coordinator at the end of December 2023, I asked God: "What do you want me to do next, Lord? Which former ministry would you like me to go back to?"

When I said yes to the leadership ministry, I left behind outreach ministries that I truly loved. God made me realise His response is different. He spoke wisdom into my heart, instructing me to find something new. As the days passed, this instruction grew stronger. Suddenly, I remembered this Bible verse from Isaiah 43:19: "I am beginning something new; do you not perceive it?" God is indeed a God of new beginnings, leading me to a new ministry called Community Research. I felt so happy and excited when I was invited in June 2024 to join the Community Research Team being organised and trained by Baobab Women's Project and the University of Birmingham.

As a Columban Lay Missionary assigned to Britain since 2010 and serving for many years in various charities accompanying migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Birmingham, I am aware of their issues and struggles. I always pray for them and their concerns. As we journey together, a question keeps coming back to me in my heart: "What else could be done to help improve their lives?"

Part of the answer to this question came through my involvement with the Community Research. I underwent hands-on research whilst training with Birmingham University and Baobab Women's Project. It provided me with another opportunity to contribute positively. I was required to interview and document real-life events of migrants behind the statistical numbers. This included their struggles, their concerns and their pleas whilst keeping their identity anonymous.

Community Research also allows me to share my knowledge and insights into the plight of migrant people with master's students of Migration Studies. In consultation with the people themselves, we continually recommend appropriate solutions and advocate for policy changes to improve their lives. God is now calling me to a new beginning with my fiancé,

Kush, to build our life together. After 14 years as a Lay Missionary, I will finish my contract on April 1, 2026. I have already informed the Columbans that I have decided to stay up until that date. The Columbans have been God's key instruments in many of these new beginnings in my life. My heart is full of gratitude for the many years I was able to serve God through Columban Mission and for the many lessons and learnings in life that may help me in the next stage of my life. Kush and I are very grateful.

I will always feel connected to the Columbans in spirit because their values and priorities in mission will stay close to my heart. The Columbans will remain like a family to me, one that I have grown with here in Britain throughout my years of service.

As our Regional Director, Fr John Boles, mentioned in his reply message to the notice of my decision: "Be assured that, beyond April 2026, you will always have a place in our hearts and be forever regarded as a cherished member of the extended – if no longer immediate – Columban family." That message really touched my heart and with that, I realised the end of my contract does not mean goodbye, but hello to a new way of relating. Thank you, God. You are indeed the God of new beginnings!

GERTRUDES C. SAMSON

Columban lay missionary Gertrudes C. Samson, lives and works in Britain.



Columban lay missionary Gertrudes C. Samson receiving her certificate for Community Research from Dr. Lisa Goodson from the University of Birmingham. Photo: Gertrudes C. Samson

THE TRANSFORMATION OF MY PRAYER INTENTION



Columban Fr Seo Kyung Hi (right) with fellow missionaries during his mission journey in Taiwan.

Looking back, I realise that my prayer has always carried a particular intention and that intention has been quietly but steadily transformed over time.

As a child, my prayer was simple, clear and very focused. Deeply influenced by my family's faith, I developed the habit of stopping by the church on my way to and from school. There, I would pray a novena, asking God earnestly that I might become a priest. At that stage, prayer was centred on asking - on hoping that something specific would be granted. My desire was sincere, but it was also very much about fulfilment: that my vocation would be realised according to what I believed God wanted for me.

After I joined the Columban Missionaries, however, my understanding of prayer began to shift. Through spiritual direction, I gradually came to see that prayer is not primarily about obtaining something from God, but about entering a living relationship with Him. This insight gently but profoundly changed my prayer life. My focus shifted from achieving a goal to deepening a relationship. Prayer became less about speaking and more about listening, less about striving and more about being present. I began to desire not simply to do God's will, but to remain with Him, to grow in intimacy and trust.

Photo: Fr Seo Kyung Hi SSC

A further transformation took place after my ordination, when I was assigned to serve in an indigenous parish in Taiwan. There, in the reality of pastoral ministry, I came to recognise something new. Until then, my attention had been largely on my relationship with God. But in accompanying the faithful, I began to understand that my role was not to stand at the centre, but to help others enter their own relationship with God. I was not the destination, but a bridge; not the source, but an instrument. This realisation shifted my prayer outward. I grew in appreciation for communal prayer and for the life of shared faith. Prayer was no longer only personal - it became something lived and nurtured within a community.

My missionary experiences in China and Korea, especially my time serving as a regional leader in Korea, have broadened this awareness even further. Responsibility, discernment and the challenges of leadership invited me to see God's mission from a wider perspective. I began to understand that mission is not limited to personal calling or even to a particular community. It participates in something much larger - the ongoing work of God in the world.

Through a process of discernment that eventually led me back to Taiwan, my prayer intention underwent yet another deepening. I found myself less concerned with what I should accomplish and more attentive to who I was being called to become. My prayer gradually took shape as a desire: to be a gift to others - not in a grand way, but in the quiet, everyday encounters of mission life. I hope that my presence, my listening and my relationships may become small signs of God's love and closeness.

Today, my prayer is simple, yet it holds within it the journey of many years: "Lord, let me become a missionary who is a gift to all whom I meet." In this prayer, I no longer place myself at the centre. Instead, I entrust myself to God's mission, asking only that my life may be received and given for others. And in this ongoing journey, I continue to learn what it means to pray.

FR SEO KYUNG HI

Columban Fr Seo Kyung Hi lives and works in Taiwan.

HONOURING FAITH AND MISSION

Thursday, November 27, 2025, was a glorious day for the Archdiocese of Suva. We rejoiced with the 58 dedicated men and women of the Navesi Catechist Training Centre, Class of 2023–2025, who were formally installed as catechists. The Installation Mass was held at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Suva, presided over by the Most Reverend Archbishop Peter Loy Chong.

This installation marks the culmination of the catechists' intense three-year formation and the beginning of their vital ministry across our parishes. My family rejoiced and praised God during the installation this day because one of the 58 newly installed catechists was my brother, Aloisio Tamatawale. It was a moment of deep gratitude and blessing as we witnessed the fruits of faith, commitment and service.

The Navesi Catechist Training Centre was inaugurated in May 1973 by Columban Fr Jim Gavigan (RIP). It was established to formalise the training of lay catechists to lead communities in the absence of priests, particularly in rural and remote areas of the Archdiocese of Suva. Fr Gavigan directed the Centre until 1980, when he handed it over to a local diocesan priest, Fr Ray Kavuru.

As I reflect on that moment in our faith journey, on how the faith was taught, shared, lived and practised, I see that it all begins at home. Growing up, our family listened to stories from my paternal grandparents about missionary priests.

The missionaries were young, mostly Irish, tall, fair-skinned and most with red hair, who evangelised, preached and taught the faith, including the catechism of the Catholic Church and its traditions and devotions, to various communities. They were Columban missionary priests.

Our grandparents faithfully passed on the Catholic traditions, feasts and devotions they learned from



Aloisio Tamatawale and his wife blessed by Archbishop Peter Loy.

the Columban missionary priests. Through the difficulties, challenges, sadness and joyful moments we have experienced in life, we have held firmly to our faith because of what we witnessed in the lives of our grandparents and parents. The faith they lived and practised, grounded in Catholic traditions and devotions and trusting in God, has been fruitful, as two from my family have become Columban Lay Missionaries, one a Columban priest and one a catechist. All were trained, formed and educated by Columban priests who served in Fiji.

Although many of these missionary priests have now passed away or returned to Ireland, the flame of faith remains alive in our families and in the lives of many Catholics throughout Fiji.

I believe that synodality began to be taught and practised by Columban missionary priests in Fiji in the 1970s, particularly through the establishment of the Catechist Training Centre in Navesi to train and empower laypeople to participate in God's mission.

Pope Francis enlivened the Church. He reminded us of synodality and led us along the path of a Synodal Church in which all baptised Christians walk together in faith, in the spirit of Participation, Communion and Mission.

SAINIANA TAMATAWALE

Columban lay missionary Sainiana Tamatawale lives and works in Fiji.

Photo: Sainiana Tamatawale

THE FUTURE OF MODERN MISSION

Just recently, Pope Leo XIV sent out a letter, dated April 12, 2026, to all Cardinals inviting them to a meeting in Rome on June 26 to 27. This will be a follow-up to a meeting on synodality that was held only three months ago in Rome. It seems that during that meeting in January there emerged the need to focus on Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

This document, whose title is taken from the first two words of the Latin version, can be translated "The Gospel of joy". According to Pope Leo in his letter to the Cardinals, it concerns "mission and the transmission of faith".

In many ways it could be seen as the signature statement of Pope Francis' papacy. While he would be more known as the author of such ground-breaking and thought-provoking proclamations, such as *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, this exhortation on "the proclamation of the gospel in today's world" will, I believe, be seen as having a more profound impact.

Francis and Leo were both members of missionary congregations, the Jesuits and the Augustinians. Mission lay very much at the centre of their thinking and personal commitments. What we have to be aware of is that both men would have understood the impact of the Second Vatican Council on missionary organisations around the world. As a result of the Council and its decree "Ad Gentes: On the Mission Activity of the Church", mission was no longer seen as a peripheral activity of the Church but rather as at the heart of what it means to be Church. By "peripheral",

I do not mean it was unimportant but that it took place out on the edges, so to speak, of the Catholic world. We used to look forward to listening to the stories of missionaries who spoke about what they did in these distant places called "the missions".

In contrast to this notion of mission, the bishops at the Second Vatican Council said: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (n.2). This had a profound impact on many missionaries around the world who wondered whether there was any further need for their vocation or ministry. After all, everybody in the Church is now a missionary!

As a missionary Society we have been grappling with this notion of mission as being at the heart of what it means to be church and also as central to our call to cross "boundaries of country, language and culture" (n. 102, Constitutions of the Missionary Society of St Columban).

We contribute to the building up of local churches, to promoting dialogue between Christians and those of other religious traditions and to speaking out, with the local church, in areas of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

As such we should be in a good position to reflect upon the implications of what Pope Francis was saying about the future of modern mission. I intend to explore further, in future articles, what *Evangelii Gaudium* is saying about that future and the challenges we face in the present.

FR TOM ROUSE

Regional Councillor of Oceania

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE LEO XIV

June - For the values of sports: Let us pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter and dialogue among cultures and nations and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity and personal growth.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

JUNE



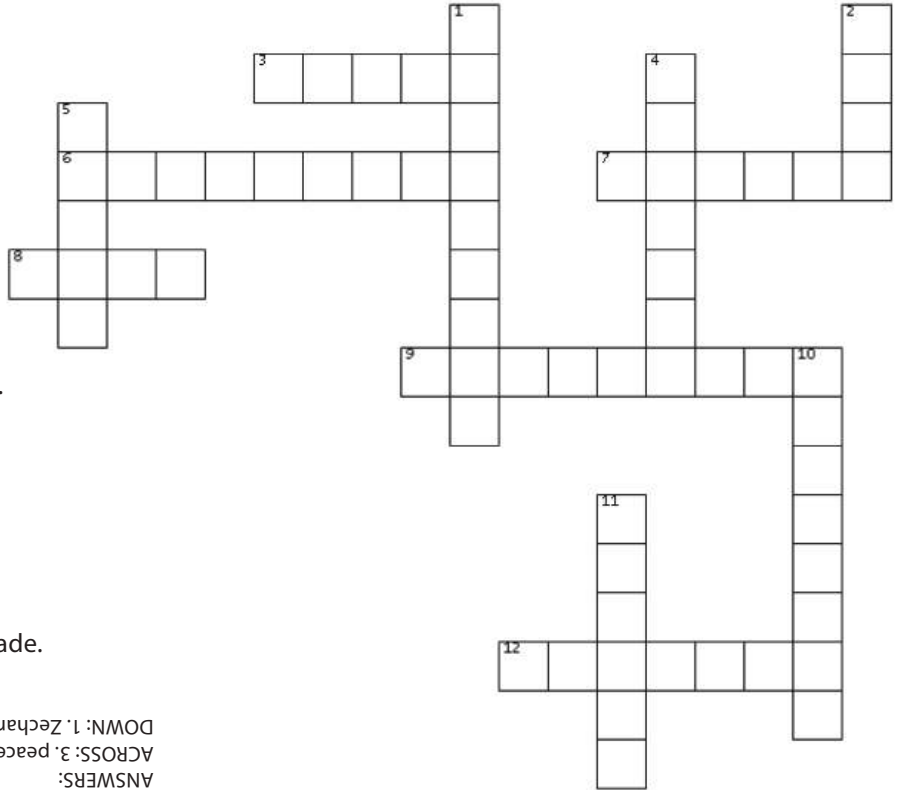
SCAN QR CODE to read the June 2026 Columban Calendar Art Guide and complete the crossword puzzle.

ACROSS

3. Zechariah said John would guide feet into its way.
6. Mother of John the Baptist.
7. The warm light in the painting.
8. Gospel where this story is found.
9. John would give knowledge of this.
12. John is known as John the (one word).

DOWN

1. Elderly father of John the Baptist.
2. The newborn child in the painting.
4. John was called a great.
5. John prepared the way for him.
10. Feast celebrating a birth.
11. The support on which the painting was made.



ANSWERS:
DOWN: 1. Zechariah, 2. John, 4. prophet, 5. Jesus, 10. Nativity, 11. copper
ACROSS: 3. peace, 6. Elizabeth, 7. golden, 8. Luke, 9. salvation, 12. Baptist



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'Do what you can' Bishop Edward J Galvin



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