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Cover photo: A simple meal, shared laughter and the joy of being young again - participants preparing food together during the Student Environmental Leadership Camp in Myitkyina.

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LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

I was shocked and horrified by the December 14, 2025, antisemitic attack on Jews celebrating *Hanukkah* on Bondi Beach. Fifteen people were murdered and 40 were injured. It traumatised victims, their families and the members of the Jewish community. It was the worst terrorist attack on Australian soil. It appalled all people of goodwill, here in Australia and around the world.

I immediately reached out to Rabbis and to other Jewish friends to share their grief and tears and to assure them of my solidarity. Messages of sympathy and support for the Jewish community flowed in from churches, other faiths and interfaith groups, including the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and from government, community and civic organisations.

The violent assault on those celebrating the Jewish festival was an act of evil, of destruction, of darkness. Ironically, the feast of Hanukkah is a celebration of salvation, of hope, of light. That hope is expressed vividly by the Prophet Isaiah in the reading proclaimed at Christmas Midnight Mass: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone" (Is: 9:2).

Even amid the terror unleashed on Bondi Beach, there was light in the darkness. There was the Jewish couple who lost their lives trying to prevent the attack. There was the Muslim who risked his life to disarm one of the killers. There were those who remained in the danger zone to protect others and the first responders who entered it to tend to the wounded. And there was the tsunami of support and solidarity from Bahai's, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, people of all faiths and worldviews, all expressing our common humanity.

The subsequent politicisation and divisiveness by some were unedifying. Laws have been enacted to curb hate speech and to further restrict access to guns. But the trauma of that night will linger for years to come.

The Bondi terrorist attack against Jews is part of the many conflicts raging piecemeal around the world, in Gaza, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, Ukraine, just to mention a few. All religions oppose war and violence. All religions propose peace. When miscreants use politics, race or religion to divide people, religious believers have a responsibility to promote unity and reconciliation.

Silence is necessary. We must create a space for the "other". We have a duty to listen to the victims, to understand their pain and hurt. But silence alone is ambiguous. It can mean genuine solidarity, but it can also condone evil. It needs to be interpreted. The wrong kind of silence is betrayal.

As well as listening, we also have a duty to speak up for the victims, the voiceless, to ensure that their legitimate concerns are heard, that they are respected and treated with dignity, not left wounded and dying at the side of the road (c.f. Lk 10:25-37), the discarded victims of others' march of conquest.

I believe that we Christians who confess a crucified and risen Saviour have a special responsibility to respond to the conflicts of our time. We follow a Christ who chose to identify with the powerless, the poor, the vulnerable, the victims. He went to the cross willingly and obediently. He was silent before his tormentors. We follow a Christ who triumphed over death by the power of love. He is risen. His light shines on all the world and all its peoples. His first words to his disciples were, "Peace be with you". (Jn 20:19, 21, 26).

By our baptism, Christians have been inserted into Christ's death and resurrection. We are called to follow Him. We are to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation among all peoples and all creation.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Regional Director of Oceania



THE PATH OF PATIENCE AND JOY



Columban lay missionary Febie Gonzales.

I write in memory of Bart (not his real name), a student I once cared for who had epilepsy and struggled to speak. He needed help with eating and drinking and had to wear a bib because of excessive saliva. Yet he was playful, happy and joyful.

Every day, he would arrive at the centre where I worked, backpack on his back and with the handles of a plastic bag, filled with biscuits and sweets, looped around his wrist. He would settle into his chair like a king, contentedly playing with his plastic bag. No one dared to make him stand up because once he did, it marked the start of an eventful day.

At mealtimes, we had to feed him separately because otherwise he would roam around and grab his classmates' food. He was no problem when he sat quietly, but once he started running around, I had to run after him. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, an hour before going home, he would become very restless and excited, looking for bread. He often got inside the office to grab something to eat before going home.

His energy and joy could not be contained. He would fall to the ground, lie there playing and then get up to run again. One time, while I was trying to stop him from running, we accidentally fell over. Luckily, neither of us was injured. There was also a time when I tried

to give him water and he spat at me and threw away the plastic cup I was holding. With mixed feelings, I cried and asked myself why I was dealing with such a person. I even felt that I didn't want to look after him anymore.

However, he also showed kindness. One day, when he saw me standing while feeding one of his classmates, he came over, picked up a chair and offered it to me. This simple gesture amazed the teachers and his classmates.

Every time I took him to the toilet, the teachers reminded me to wear gloves and wash my hands thoroughly. It was because he had a skin condition. Sometimes his skin would bleed and dried blood would stick to his clothes. This discovery made me feel very sorry for him.

Another moment that deeply touched me was when I witnessed one of his seizures. He needed a long time to recover, lying on the floor until he felt better. During those times, our priority was to ensure his safety. He must have suffered considerable pain, yet he lived joyfully despite his disabilities.

I also observed the deep bond he shared with his mother and how lovingly she cared for him whenever she visited the centre. When she passed away, he was transferred to another facility and from then on, I did not hear any news of him until one night he visited me in my dreams.

He was transformed into a handsome man, well-dressed and smiling at me. When I asked my colleagues about him, they told me that he passed away a few months after his mother died. I felt very sad when I heard this news. But I believe he is at peace now and free from suffering.

Another moment that deeply touched me was when I witnessed one of his seizures. He needed a long time to recover, lying on the floor until he felt better. During those times, our priority was to ensure his safety. He must have suffered considerable pain, yet he lived joyfully despite his disabilities.



Bart taught me to explore the meaning of patience and compassion and reminded me that true joy and strength can come from the most unexpected people. Despite his struggles with epilepsy, difficulty speaking and physical limitations, Bart lived each day with a contagious energy that touched everyone around him. His story made me realise that caring for others, especially those with special needs, is not only about patience but also about love and understanding.

There were moments of frustration and exhaustion, but these were also profound lessons in compassion and gratitude. Bart's simple acts - like offering me a chair - show that kindness doesn't depend on ability but on the heart's capacity to love. His joy, even amid pain, taught me a deeper meaning of resilience.

My brief journey with Bart left a lasting impression on my heart, a reminder that every person, regardless of their condition, carries beauty and purpose. His

memory inspires me to serve with patience, to find joy in small things and to love beyond limitations.

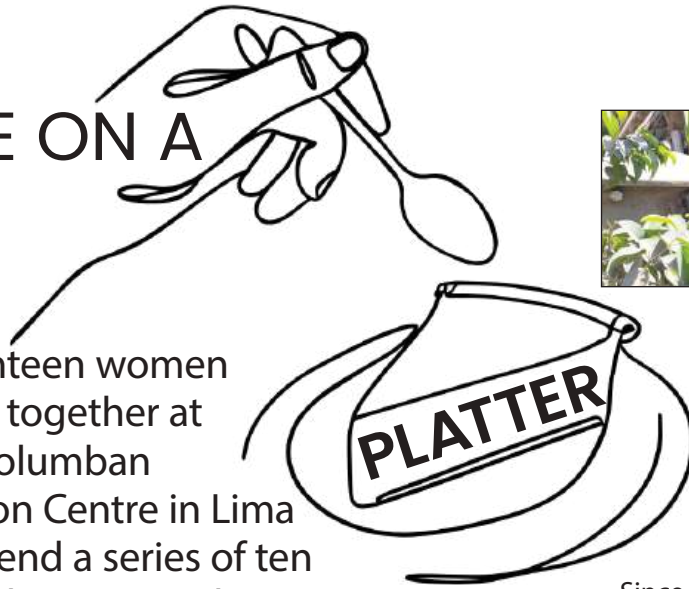
May he now be enjoying eternal joy, peace and life in paradise with his Creator.

FEBIE GONZALES

Columban lay missionary Febie Gonzales lives and works in Taiwan.

My brief journey with Bart left a lasting impression on my heart, a reminder that every person, regardless of their condition, carries beauty and purpose. His memory inspires me to serve with patience, to find joy in small things and to love beyond limitations.

LIFE ON A



Seventeen women came together at the Columban Mission Centre in Lima to attend a series of ten workshops on making pastries. Their hope was to equip themselves to start a small business at home, which would enable them to provide additional financial support for their families.

Among the seventeen women were several migrants from Ecuador, while others had arrived from Venezuela. The rest were Peruvians who had travelled from remote towns or villages to the capital city in search of a better life for themselves and their families. One Peruvian, who had spent eight years in Mexico, now felt like a foreigner back in her home country.



Almost all of them felt overwhelmed by the frantic pace of city life. Though they were surrounded by over eleven million people, they felt isolated and lonely without the support of their extended family, neighbours and friends.

Since more than one-quarter of the people of Lima live in poverty, it is a major challenge for new arrivals to find suitable accommodation and regular employment. Besides, many of those seventeen women had a low level of formal education or were unable to take on certain kinds of jobs due to family commitments.

Mrs Marisol Rojas, the Coordinator of the Columban Mission Centre, explained the vision, "The pastry-making workshops were intended not just to enable those seventeen women to support their families, but also to grow as persons in their new surroundings."

Elaborating, she went on, "The sessions, which took place twice a week, were led by Elena, an experienced confectioner, so the participants learned the craft of



Participants baking pastries in the workshop.



Participants display their pastries produced from the workshop.



Participants celebrate at the conclusion of the pastry-making workshop.

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

Reflecting on his experience of supporting Mrs Marisol Rojas and accompanying another group of women who had participated in a similar workshop series at the Columban Mission Centre some months previously, Fr Dylan Tabaco, a Columban missionary from the Philippines, said, "Creating and baking, learning and relating together enabled the women from various backgrounds to understand and respect each other. Since all of them had experienced the prejudice and pain of being an outsider, they understood the importance of stretching one's mind and heart in order to go beyond superficial perceptions and come to know one another at a deeper level. The pastry-making workshops provided them with opportunities to make new friends, gave them confidence and skills to explore new ways to support their families and

deepened their faith in God who accompanies them through all the ups and downs of life." While none of the women who have participated in the pastry-making workshops envisage their future as "life on a platter", all of them have discovered how a platter of delicious pastries can nurture not only their taste buds but their spirits and dreams.

FR TIM MULROY

Columban Fr Tim Mulroy lives and works in Britain.



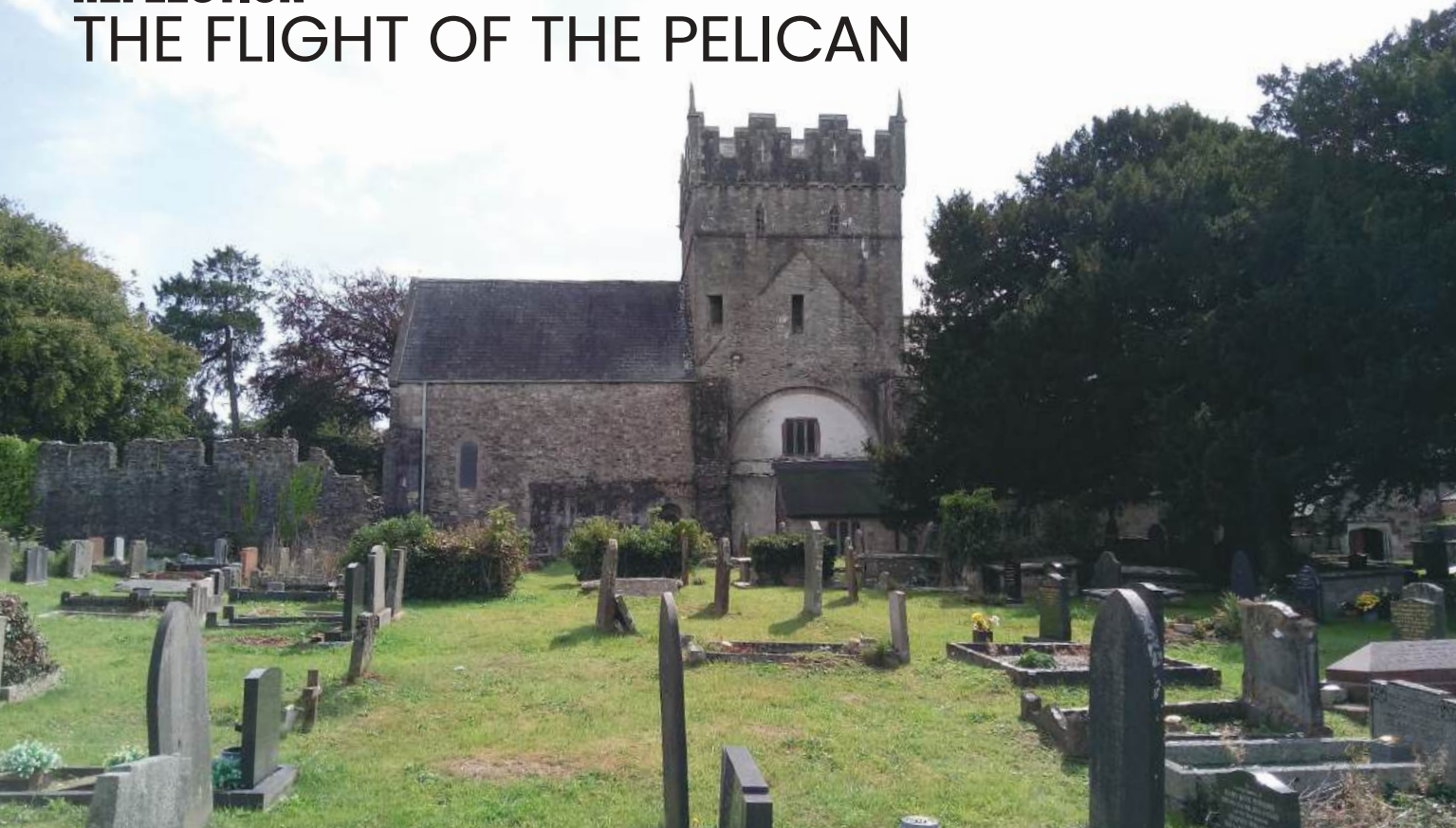
SCAN QR CODE to watch **Empowering women through skills and solidarity**



Marisol Rojas, the Coordinator of the Columban Mission Centre and a Columban co-worker in Peru, shares insights from a workshop she organised together with Fr Erl Tabaco, focusing on one of the Columban Mission priorities: Ministry for Migrants. She describes how the workshop became a safe and welcoming space of refuge, accompaniment and hope for migrant mothers and children, offering them support, encouragement and a sense of belonging during a time of vulnerability and transition.

REFLECTION

THE FLIGHT OF THE PELICAN



Ewenny Priory 1141 founded by the Benedictines on the edge of Bridgend.

Ask anyone what they know about Bridgend in South Wales and they'll almost certainly mention the rugby team. Bridgend Ravens (formerly Bridgend RFC) have been stalwarts of Welsh rugby for 145 years. However, just a mile or so away, lies St Mary's Catholic Church, with a history that goes back nearly two thousand years.

Christianity arrived in South Wales with the Romans. During the chaotic days of the break-up of the Roman Empire and the Anglo-Saxon invasions, Christianity clung to Britain's western fringes, including the shores of the Severn Estuary. Tradition has it that St Patrick came from these parts. Just a few miles from Bridgend lie the remains of St Illtud's Monastery, perhaps the most important centre of Celtic spirituality and learning of the fifth century and Christian gravestones from the period have been discovered in Bridgend itself.

Fast-forward seven centuries and the Normans arrive on the scene, bringing with them a different style of monasticism courtesy of the Benedictines. They built the magnificent Ewenny Priory on the edge of Bridgend. The old priory church survives to this day, a glorious example of Romanesque architecture. Ewenny dominated Christian life in the area throughout the rest of the Middle Ages.

It was during the mediaeval period that the pelican was first used as a Christian motif. According to legend, the mother pelican feeds her chicks from blood pecked from her own breast (a belief based on the habitual way a pelican shields its famous long beak in its front parts). Early Christians saw in this a metaphor for the Paschal Mystery and Eucharist of Jesus. Just as the mother pelican gives life to its offspring by the shedding of her blood, so Christ redeems God's children by the shedding of His blood and gives them eternal life through the receiving of His blood at holy communion.

In 1536, Henry VIII dissolved Ewenny Priory, along with all the other monasteries of England and Wales. The priory was purchased by the Carne family, who,

despite Henry's takeover of the Church, managed to retain their Catholic faith into the reign of Elizabeth I. Their coat of arms was ... the pelican. As it turned out, the "vulning" (or "self-wounding") pelican was soon to become a true symbol of Bridgend's embattled Catholic population, for troubled times lay ahead. This area was one of the few parts of Wales that kept the Catholic faith and it paid a heavy price for doing so. During the seventeenth century, Saints John Lloyd and Philip Evans were active in the locality. Both were arrested in 1678 on properties owned by the recusant Catholic Turbevill family (who, coincidentally, would later become proprietors of Ewenny). Both saints were eventually hanged, drawn and quartered at Cardiff during the hysteria of Titus Oates's "Popish Plot".

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the faith was rekindled by the arrival of Irish immigrants. As there was no church in Bridgend, they periodically assembled outside the Coach and Horses tavern and trekked the twenty miles or more to receive the sacraments in Cardiff. Eventually, a member of the local gentry who had converted to Catholicism, a certain Captain Iltid Nicholl, came to the rescue and offered to buy the site of an old sawmill and build a church. This was St Mary's, opened in 1855.

The congregation was soon swollen by immigrants from another quarter - the Italians who came to work in the local quarries. The rocks around Bridgend include a rare and valuable formation known as quarella, a stone more commonly found in Italy - hence, the attraction for skilled quarrymen from that country. Unfortunately, this chapter took a dark turn. At the outbreak of the Second World War, many of Italian origin were rounded up as "enemy aliens". Some later found themselves aboard the ill-fated *SS Arandora Star*. En route to internment camps in Canada, it was torpedoed by U-47 off the coast of Ireland on July 2, 1940. Tragically, the ship sank, with the loss of over 800 lives.

Just as the mother pelican gives life to its offspring by the shedding of her blood, so Christ redeems God's children by the shedding of His blood and gives them eternal life through the receiving of his blood at holy communion.



Columban Fr John Boles (right) with Fr Tim McGrath and the pelican church.

All this rich and sacred history led to the decision in the 1990s to build a new church on the same site. Courageously, the diocese chose to base the design and ornamentation of the church upon the symbol of the pelican, which by then had become representative of the community's sufferings and triumphs. When I visited St Mary's to deliver the Columban appeal, the current parish priest, Fr Tim McGrath, was eager to point out every example. He enthused, "Here is the pelican on the doors of the church ... Here it is again on top of the tabernacle ... See, we've even got it as the parish logo on all our correspondence."

However, he left the best till last. Taking me outside, he pointed out the crowning glory. The whole church has been designed to echo the same symbol. "Look," said Tim, "the building looks just like a pelican with its beak in its breast and its wings outstretched!"

Perhaps the comparison isn't *immediately* apparent to the untrained eye. Yet, as the Gospels teach us, sometimes the "eyes of faith" are what count.

FR JOHN BOLES

Columban Fr John Boles lives and works in Britain.

A COVENANT WITH GOD



Angie (far right) with fellow lay missionary Sherryl Lou Capili standing beside her, Columban Fr Sean Coyle (centre) and Sherryl Lou's brother and sister-in-law (left) during a mission appeal at St Charles Borromeo in Leixlip, Ireland.

When visiting the sick, I often find myself listening to people who have known serious setbacks in life. Some continue to put their trust in God despite the setbacks. Others have lost their faith but are seeking a way to open themselves, once again, to God. With an inner confidence, I offer prayers for them, believing in my heart that God will always be with them, as He has been with me every step of the way.

As a person of faith and a Columban Missionary, I reflect on my own relationship with God and ask myself: *Who is God for me? What are my images of God? Do I love God? How do I communicate with God? How do I nurture my relationship with God?*

Pondering these questions leads me back to the very first moment of God's presence in my life. I can trace it back to the genesis of my existence in the world. In Jeremiah 1:5, it is written, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." These extraordinary words tell me that my relationship with God began before I was even conceived.

I did not know God then, but He knew me and always loved me. The fact that I was given the gift of life, given also the opportunity to live in this world, is for me, as a person of faith, evidence of God's generous, unconditional love. Through the gift of my baptism, I was brought into the Christian life and family when, as a baby, Fr Sean Anthony Dunne, a Columban priest from Ireland, administered that special sacrament.

Through my parents - who awakened me to God's love and mercy - this relationship started to grow and become two-way. As I gradually grew in understanding that God was not the only one working for this relationship, I began to seek God more.

Photo: Angelica Escarsa

Growing up, my father, though not very religious, told me that God is up in heaven and could see everything. Therefore, I should always do good, otherwise God would not be happy with me. That is when I realised God is always there, even if I do not see Him.

In our house, we had different images of Jesus, like Christ the King, The Face of Jesus, The Eye and the Crucifix. When I asked my mother who they were, she would say God. In my innocence, I asked her why God had so many faces.

God surrounds us and He gives us the gift of wonder and awe in His presence. This then became the very foundation of what I describe as my covenant with God. I understood that words and images would never be able to capture the face of God. I realised God is beyond imagining, that our naked eye cannot grasp and our mind cannot fathom the abundant love and mercy He has for us. This is the great mystery of faith that keeps me humble and vulnerable before Him. I am reminded of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew when he asked Simon Peter, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:13–20).

My understanding of God is fundamental to how I articulate my relationship with Him. God for me is my creator, the giver of life, my destiny, my strength, my stronghold, my refuge, my saviour, my friend, my consoler and my protector. This understanding of God has been influenced by the people around me. I experience God's presence through His people. My parents' understanding, for example, of God as the divine source of all life helped me see God as the beginning and the end of everything: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev 22:13).

This theology evolved and so did my relationship with God, guided by my religion teacher, who introduced me to reading the Bible and Fr Paddy Duggan, our parish priest in Immaculate Conception in Barretto, the Philippines, where I grew up.

My faith continued to be nurtured during my five years of preparation at the Columban College Catechetical Centre, founded by Columban Sister, Sr Maura Dillon. This preparation enabled me to become a Religious and Values Education teacher and through that experience, I gained more opportunities to grasp the immense and wonderful plan of God in my life.

***As a person of faith and a Columban Missionary, I reflect on my own relationship with God and ask myself:
Who is God for me?
What are my images of God? Do I love God? How do I communicate with God? How do I nurture my relationship with God?***

My missionary journey has deepened my relationship with God, making it more intimate and personal. I joined the Columban Mission at the age of twenty-four, which gave me a new meaning and purpose in life. There were moments of searching and seeking God's assurance that I was truly following the right path. So, it became "Me and My God" and his grand scheme for me. Those were the times when my friends and colleagues began settling down, starting families, getting new jobs and enjoying life with their loved ones and friends around them, while I was a thousand miles away from home. However, through the path I have followed, God has become my home and my refuge, the One who is with me till the end of time.

God has also allowed me to realise that life on earth offers only a glimpse of life with Him for all eternity in heaven. The death of family members during my time as a missionary, when I lived far from home, was hard to bear. But when grief was my only prayer, God became my comfort and solace.

In the various circumstances of my life, God has revealed Himself to me. With great trust in His plan, I embrace the life He has asked me to live.



ANGELICA ESCARSA

Columban lay missionary Angelica Escarsa lives and works in Ireland.

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala (back row) with the participants from the Student Leadership Camp.



BECOMING CHILDREN AGAIN

Just in time for the celebration of *Laudato Si'* Week, the annual Student Leadership Camp for new members of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina Juniors was conducted from May 24 – 28, 2025 at the Centre for Learning Alternatives for Youth, Pa La Na, Myitkyina, Kachin State. A total of 27 participants aged 14 to 18 joined.

The war has taken the joy of childhood from many children in Myanmar. In some places, they have to run to dugout bomb shelters every time the air raids come. Many schools and monasteries have been bombed recently. Besides the war, many children and young people face the impacts of the climate crisis, such as flooding. In July 2024, the biggest flood in twenty years destroyed many parts of Kachin State. Our centre had to move all our things and the generator to higher ground to prevent the floodwaters from destroying them.

As the ongoing conflict has increased mining activities in the State, destroying much of the remaining forest areas and mountains of Kachin land, we decided to tweak the camp to include environmental awareness. People are becoming more aware of the unwelcome consequences of some human activities.

Besides Catholic Social Teachings, the See Judge Act Method and Leadership skills, we also introduced the participants to *Laudato Si'*, biodiversity and practical solid waste management. The Student Environmental

Leadership Camp is designed to form future leaders of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM). The Camp has three focuses: Community, Environment and Leadership.

Participants from the previous year's camp also joined as volunteers and even presenters. Philip Zau Mai Du, who was elected the president of the Catholic Students Action Myitkyina Juniors committee, presented to peers at the Catholic Social Teachings, together with Helen Ban Li. Both Philip and Helen are also students of the Positive Youth Development certificate program of the Student Learning Resources Centre. Peter just completed the nine-month Positive Youth Development certificate program of the Student Learning Resources Centre, where he is now doing an internship in administration.

Philip introduced himself as a student from Myanmar who was always eager to learn new things. He explained his philosophy thus: "I believe that even small actions can make a big difference and I want to use my knowledge and energy to do something good for my community and my country. I want to tell the world that every young person deserves peace, hope and opportunity. Even though we face many struggles, we still have dreams and the power to make a difference. Please listen to the voices of young people from countries like Myanmar. Support us, stand with us and help build a future where all young people can live in dignity, freedom and love."

The camp also included team-building games, which the participants enjoyed a lot and a cooking showdown allowed the participants to show off their cooking skills. They also prayed the Ecological Prayer, which allowed them to incorporate environmental concerns while praying the rosary.



Participants enjoying the different camp activities.



Participants enjoying the team-building activities.

The team-building activities were designed to allow the participants to get to know each other, to have fun and build camaraderie. I overheard one young person say, "That was the first time in a long time that I felt like a child again and had fun!"

A teacher from the Young Christian Men's Association (YMCA), Myitkyina, introduced Human Theatre to the participants. A script was prepared because of the lack of time and the participants had to enact the prepared script. Human Theatre is a tool to educate communities about certain issues through drama. It is interactive and creative. Through the drama, we could admire the acting skills of the participants. The drama was later presented to the public at the close of the camp.

On the last night, the participants showed off other talents such as singing and dancing. The talent show lasted for almost three hours, with still more participants and volunteers wanting to show what they could do.

The five days and four nights provided these youth with some respite from the uncertainties of life that they face every day. Many of them, especially the boys who are turning 18, will also have to face the reality of the conscription law, which requires all men aged 18–35 to serve in the military.

Most participants found the camp topics relevant and useful, mentioning that the camp had inspired them to act on environmental or community issues.

FR KURT ZION PALA

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.

Photos: Fr Kurt Zion Pala SSC

A LOOK ACROSS THE BORDER AT NORTH KOREA



Photo: TIM FENG Xichen (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_QingNian_street_of_Shenyang.jpg),
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I last visited the border between China and North Korea in 2015, when COVID-19 lay in the unknown future. Little did I know then that it would be 10 years before I saw this region again. In 2025, I was finally given the opportunity to travel - this time to Shenyang and Dandong - together with several priests from the Bishops' Committee for National Reconciliation.

We arrived in Shenyang after a two-hour morning flight from Incheon International Airport. This visit came at a significant time, as North Korea had recently reopened its airspace after years of closure due to the pandemic. Koryo Airlines had begun repatriating North Korean citizens stranded in Beijing and Shenyang - people who had been unable to return home for several years.

Shenyang is a city whose name is represented in Korean by the Chinese characters: 宣揚. Located in the heart of China's Dongbei region, it is known for heavy military industries and holds strategic importance as a gateway connecting northeastern China to the Korean Peninsula. Many ethnic Chinese-North Koreans from Pyongan and Kyongsang provinces live in Shenyang and surrounding cities. Moreover, North Koreans working in factories and restaurants across China were unable to return home when the borders were sealed during COVID-19.

The West Pagoda district is filled with shops and restaurants, including some run by North Koreans. However, the North Korean-owned restaurants do not accept customers from South Korea. I am unsure whether the situation is the same in Southeast Asia. I have seen videos of people visiting North Korean restaurants there, but it is difficult to know whether these were recorded recently or before the pandemic.

Shenyang also carries deep historical and spiritual significance. During the Boxer Rebellion at the end of the Qing Dynasty (1899–1901), more than 150 Catholic believers - including monks, priests and a bishop - were reportedly killed in front of Shenyang Cathedral. The first two bishops of the diocese are buried beneath the cathedral's central aisle. Sadly, most historical records were destroyed during the Cultural

“May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, for it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body.” (Colossians 3:15) May the Lord grant reconciliation and unity to the Korean people. May old wounds be healed, hearts softened and hope renewed.

Revolution, leaving only faint traces of these martyrs. A statue of the Virgin Mary dressed in Qing Dynasty style remains a powerful symbol of faith embedded within Chinese culture.

The city is also connected to Korean history. Shenyang houses the portrait of Crown Prince Sohyeon of the Joseon Dynasty. After King Injo surrendered to the Qing Emperor in 1637, Prince Sohyeon and his wife were taken to Shenyang as hostages. During his eight-year detention, Prince Sohyeon encountered Western learning through Adam Schall, a Catholic missionary he met in Beijing. He sought to care for fellow Korean captives by cultivating land, storing grain and trading - quiet acts of resilience and hope amid hardship.

Following lunch in West Pagoda, we travelled on to Dandong, a journey of about five hours. Dandong is a border city in Liaoning Province, separated from Sinuiju in North Pyongan Province by the Yalu River. It is frequently visited by South Korean researchers and journalists who specialise in North Korean affairs. By observing the movement of trucks and trains into North Korea, they attempt to gauge economic activity and conditions across the border. As in Shenyang, many businesses in Dandong are operated by both mainland and overseas Chinese. During our visit, I was able to enter a café-style gallery selling paintings by North Korean artists.

From the apartment used by priests stationed in Beijing and Dandong, we could clearly see Sinuiju across the Yalu River. Looking out towards Wihwa Island, we celebrated Mass for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Standing there, gazing across the river, I felt a deep sadness. “North Korea is right in front of me,” I thought. While books and reports are important, nothing compares to seeing the real thing with one’s own eyes.

North Korea has announced several special economic zones, including Rason, Kaesong, Wonsan-Mt Geumgang, Sinuiju, the Golden Pyeong and the Wihwa Island zone. These are all visible from Dandong. Because Dandong is a military area, movement is tightly controlled under China’s anti-espionage laws.

Visitors are only permitted to stop at designated tourist sites and photography is heavily restricted.

With the resumption of high-level exchanges between China and North Korea, attention has turned to the reopening of the Yalu Bridge, which connects Dandong and North Korea. Completed just before the pandemic, the bridge remained unused for years after the borders were shut. Both countries suffered significant economic losses during the pandemic and the customs facilities on the Chinese side fell into disrepair. During my visit, I could see repair work underway and vehicles on the bridge - signs that it may reopen soon.

Nearby stands the Broken Bridge, destroyed by US bombing during the Korean War. While its Chinese side remains intact as a memorial, the North Korean side has been dismantled. Beside it is the Friendship Bridge, still used for rail and freight transport.

We also took a boat ride along the Chinese side of the Yalu River, allowing us to look directly into North Korea. Though North and South Korea share the same peninsula, the division remains painfully real. There is even a one-hour time difference between the two sides of the river.

As I reflected on this journey, I was reminded how urgently peace is needed. The people of the Korean Peninsula continue to live with tension, separation and uncertainty. Our prayers are not optional - they are essential.

“May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, for it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body.” (Colossians 3:15) May the Lord grant reconciliation and unity to the Korean people. May old wounds be healed, hearts softened and hope renewed.

Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Martyrs and Saints of Korea, pray for us.

FR NAM SEUNG-WON

Columban Fr Nam Seung-Won lives and works in Korea.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN CHALLENGES



Women and children living in remote villages in Pakistan.

I arrived in Pakistan on August 6, 2025, to start my two-year First Mission Assignment (FMA). Since my arrival, I've been studying Urdu, which is Pakistan's national language. It is spoken by over 200 million people and is more than just a way to talk: it's a way of life for the Pakistani people.

Columban missionary students like me spend about nine months learning the language before starting pastoral work. This time is not just for learning the language; it's for learning about the culture and building relationships with the people.

While learning Urdu, I noticed similarities with the Korean language. It has a similar sentence structure, with subjects, objects and verbs and, like Korean, it puts a lot of emphasis on respect and politeness. These similarities helped me feel more at home with the language and made it easier for me to talk to the locals and get to know them better. They are supportive of my efforts, which encourages me to

keep going. But living as a foreigner, especially as a missionary in a new place, is not easy.

Pakistan is a unique country that emerged out of a desire to establish a separate Muslim homeland in India. Lying in the centre of South Asia, it is home to many ethnic groups and languages and continues to struggle for independence. While its culture is based on Islam, in recent years it has been going through much social and political unrest because of extremist attacks and internal conflicts. Since Pakistan and China have been working together on economic projects, attacks on Chinese people have escalated. These incidents have made it harder for Asians in general, including me, to live here.

In my own weaknesses and helplessness and the suffering of the people I encounter, I believe Jesus is always present, giving us hope. I hope that this understanding has become the centre of my life and the driving force behind my missionary journey.

In these challenging times, two experiences deeply touched me and made me rethink my identity as a missionary in Pakistan.

The first was a police check. One day, while Zau Mai, my fellow student from Myanmar, and I were on our way to a local market, we got pulled over by the police. They took us to the station for questioning. During the experience, I saw a plain-clothes officer arresting a guy and hitting him on the head. It was all crazy and scary. It dawned on me that just being East Asian made me a target for suspicion and limited my freedom of movement. This experience made me think about the constant discrimination and oppression faced by vulnerable people in society.

The second experience concerned my health. One day, while I was making kimchi with radishes, I took a bite and got a severe allergic reaction. My face turned red and itchy. Unlike in Korea, where I could easily go to a hospital, I had to rely on a priest to get me to a nearby clinic. Even after they treated me, my symptoms got worse and I had to go to a bigger hospital in Hyderabad. This experience made me feel helpless and showed me how tough it is for patients in Pakistan's underdeveloped healthcare system.

The fear I felt during the police check and the helplessness I felt at the hospital reminded me of Jesus, who came to live with the poor and outcast. He was not born in a palace but a humble stable. Even so he brought love and hope to the world.

Through these reflections, I got a better idea of how Jesus stands with those who suffer. Jesus felt sorry for the outcasts and shared in their pain, offering healing and comfort. His example shows me God's mission here in Pakistan. I feel called to be his hands and feet, reaching out to the weak and marginalised, sharing his love and hope with them. Jesus' love is not just about comforting us when we are down. It is about giving us a fresh start and offering us hope. His compassion has made me think of my imperfections. When I was scared and helpless, I realised how much I needed his grace. Jesus loves us even when we are weak and takes on our pain as his own. His love is not just pity; it is a powerful, saving love that changes our lives.

These thoughts have strengthened my desire to follow Jesus even more closely in my life. Even in places I do not know, I want to respond to his call and trust his guidance. This calling is not just about preaching the Gospel; it is also about being there for them, sharing their pain and loving them. At this moment, I rely on the peace and strength Jesus gives me as I try to do his will in this place.

Jesus lived and walked with the poor and the outcast. I want to follow in his footsteps and share his message of love and hope with everyone I meet.

In my own weaknesses and helplessness and the suffering of the people I encounter, I believe Jesus is always present, giving us hope. I hope that this understanding has become the centre of my life and the driving force behind my missionary journey.

JINWOOK KIM

Columban student Jinwook Kim lives and works in Pakistan.

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A shared act of care: planting trees to honor and celebrate 75 years of Columban presence in Negros.



On the way to plant - journeying together into a mission rooted in hope in Negros Occidental, Philippines.



Photos: Lilibeth Sabado

A SHOOT FROM THE STUMP: LIFE, LOSS AND MISSION

We are not here to rebuild the old tree - we're here to tend to what's growing now.

When I first arrived in Negros Occidental as part of a team of three lay missionaries, I carried with me a mixture of gratitude, hope and uncertainty. Each of us brought unique and shared experiences from overseas missions and from our home region. But coming to this province in the Philippines felt like stepping into something deeper - a new place, a new season and a sacred continuation of a story that began long before us.

In those early weeks, I would often go for quiet walks around the property. I needed space to listen, to breathe and to feel rooted. On one of those walks, I stumbled on an old tree stump. It was wide, weathered and cracked by time. But right at its centre, something beautiful was growing: a sturdy, vibrant shoot, rising tall and strong from the heart of what once was. That image struck me and stayed with me, almost like a quiet whisper from the land itself.

At the time, we were still reeling from the loss of Fr Brian Gore, a longtime Columban missionary whose life was woven deeply into the soil of Negros. He was not just a figure from the past; we were supposed to be working together as a team of Columbans, embracing the synodal way of doing mission. We were looking forward to learning from him, sharing the joys and challenges of mission. He was going to be a mentor, a companion, someone to walk with us as we began, but before that could happen, Brian died on Easter Sunday.

It was a loss that felt personal. There was grief, but also a sense of disorientation. We were stepping into something we did not fully know, without the presence of someone who knew it so well. I found myself wondering, "Are we really meant to be here now? Are we ready for this?"

But that image of the shoot in the stump kept coming back to me. The tree that had once stood tall was no longer there - but its roots were still alive. And from

We were not sent here to re-create the past. We are not here to replace anyone. We are here to tend what is growing now - to nurture the mission as it takes a new shape...

those roots, something strong and new was growing. It reminded me of a lesson I had learned early in my missionary life: No amount of preparation ever truly prepares you for mission. We arrive with open hands and hearts, trusting that the Spirit has already gone ahead and believing that even if we study, plan and train, mission has its own rhythm; it begins before we feel ready. It begins when God shows up.

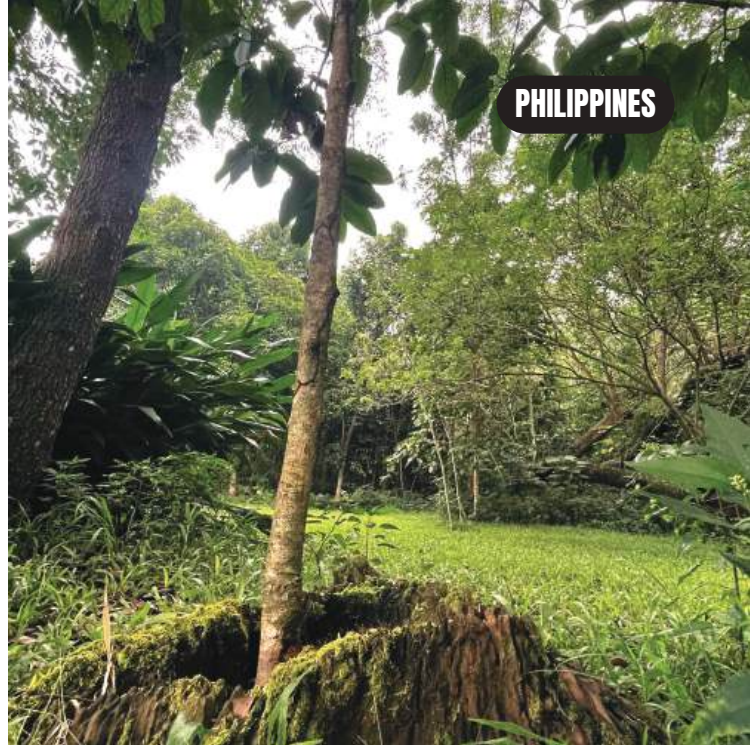
We were not sent here to re-create the past. We are not here to replace anyone. We are here to tend what is growing now - to nurture the mission as it takes a new shape. We walk with families, listen to the cries of the land, care for creation and remain present to the joys and struggles of daily life. Mission today may look different from before, but its heart remains the same: to be with, to listen, to serve and to love.

That shoot rising from the stump said exactly that to me. The great tree, like the presence of ordained non-Filipino Columbans, who defined Columban Mission as it once was, is no longer here. However, the roots remain and life still grows from them. Not a delicate beginning, but a strong, living continuation. We are not here to rebuild the old tree. We are here to tend to what's growing now - the mission taking a new form, one that's smaller but no less faithful.

We are not starting from scratch. We stand on something solid. The lives and witness of the missionaries who were here have laid deep roots. And now we are part of the growth - three Columban lay missionaries, bringing our own stories, walking with families, learning the language of the land and paying attention to the new life already rising. That image of the shoot in the stump speaks of resilience, grace through loss and the faithfulness of God, who brings life even when we feel unprepared or unsure. Mission never belongs to one generation. Like the shoot from the stump, it continues strong, surprising and full of grace. God, thank You for bringing us into this land and for the life it holds.

LILIBETH (BETH) SABADO

Columban lay missionary Lilibeth (Beth) Sabado lives and works in the Philippines.



Roots remain. Hope returns. The mission lives on.



Columban Fr Rolly Aniscal (left), Columban lay missionaries John Din, Beth Sabado, Arlenne Villahermosa (right).





ANIMA+L 2025 artwork by Columban Fr Jason Antiquera.

ART, MISSION AND CARE FOR ALL CREATURES

Last year's *ANIMA+L: Celebrating Care and Companionship with All Creatures* was an international, spiritually grounded exhibition inspired by the legacy of St Francis of Assisi, who recognised animals as fellow creatures imbued with the breath of God. It was well-timed, since 2026 marks 800 years since the death of St Francis.

The exhibition, held at the San Damiano Café of the Franciscan Education Centre in Jeong-dong, Seoul, from August 11 - 23, 2025, was a collaborative work between the Art Ministry and Jan Radovan, a Filipino artist based in France and a former lay missionary.

Drawing from the Latin *anima* (soul) and *life*, the exhibition invited viewers to reflect on animals not merely as biological beings, but as living presences sharing in divine creation. Through diverse artworks centred on animals, the exhibit highlighted themes of dignity, compassion and ecological responsibility, echoing Catholic teachings on care for creation, as articulated in Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

The concept emerged from a desire to develop a theme closely connected to the Franciscan community that operates the gallery, grounding the project in Franciscan spirituality and ecological sensitivity. Likewise, the exhibition embodied the Columban mission's current priority on biodiversity, calling for love and care to extend beyond humanity to all creatures.

This vision was realised through "*The Arts on the Move*", an art ministry concept rooted in action, dialogue and engagement with contemporary social and ecological concerns, including subtle advocacy for migrants.

A total of 36 artists from Korea, the Philippines, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and other countries participated, presenting 73 works in various media, including painting, digital art and photography. Inspired by the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi and the Church's call to ecological conversion, the artworks offered visual reflections on humanity's relationship with animals and the wider created world.

The official opening of the exhibition was held on Saturday, August 16, allowing broader participation from those working during weekdays. Attended by Columban missionaries, friends and the Consul General representing the Philippine Embassy, the event fostered a relaxed and intimate atmosphere. The program included welcoming remarks, a brief introduction to the exhibition and an interactive question-and-answer session between the artists and the audience. Coverage by a journalist from the *Catholic Times of Korea* further extended the exhibition's reach. ANIMA+L stands as a living expression of the Church's long tradition of engaging faith through beauty, imagination and reverence for creation. Rooted in the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi and resonating with the Church's call to ecological conversion, the exhibition reminds us that care for all living creatures is not optional but integral to Christian discipleship. Through art, the faithful are invited to contemplate God's presence not only in humanity but in every creature formed by the divine breath.

In continuity with the Church's understanding of art as a pathway to encountering God, ANIMA+L transforms aesthetic experiences into spiritual reflections and moral responses. It gives voice to the voiceless, fosters compassion and deepens awareness of our shared responsibility for creation. As an act of faith, the exhibition affirms that to honour life in all its forms is to participate in God's ongoing work of love and reconciliation, calling the Church to witness, through both contemplation and action, to the sacredness of our common home.

FR JASON ANTIQUERA

Columban Fr Jason Antiquera lives and works in Korea.

THE SPIRITUAL MESSAGE OF CAUSATIVE VERBS

In high school, English grammar was never my thing. Years later, in writing my theology thesis, my director advised me to rewrite the text without all the split infinitives. I wasn't even sure what a split infinitive was!

Then, I was suddenly faced with grammar again in Japanese-language school. My former high school failure impelled me to make a greater effort. There, I met something called a "causative verb". Through conversational practice, guided by a kimono-clad and skilled elderly teacher, I finally got the gist of causative verbs. Her patient practice was far more effective than a technical explanation.

Causative verbs are used when one person or thing moves another person or thing to do something. They are extensively used in the Japanese translation of the Scriptures and in our liturgy and hymnal. But there are causative verbs and causative verbs - some, to my ear, are more fitting when it comes to describing the gentle spirit at work in us. For example, in the Mass in English, we have the words: "Make me worthy to share eternal life." While "make" is a causative verb (God makes us worthy), the Japanese translation - "Cause me to enjoy eternal life" - better describes the gentle spirit at work in us. God will not *make* (as in *compel*) us do anything, but He will guide us if we ask.

A favourite hymn of Japanese congregations has a verse: "Oh Lord! Cause me to hear your words of encouragement that you spoke to Peter as he sank in the stormy waves." And another verse of the same hymn: "Oh Lord, at my death, cause me to hear the words of consolation you spoke to the thief next to you on the cross."

Causative verbs have a hidden spirituality. They acknowledge our human frailty and rely on the strength of the Lord. We are all called to be missionaries and as missionaries, we are instruments of Christ's love, each in our own milieu. We never work alone.

Jesus tells us, "Without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Paul has the same message in different words: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). The last line of Mark's Gospel stresses this point: "The Eleven went forth and the Lord worked with them." (Mark 16:28)

Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* cartoon strip often contained a Christian message. It could be decidedly biblical. Framed in my prayer corner is a strip that depicts Linus holding a shovel; in the final panel, he cries out: "I need a push from the Spirit!"

This attitude of humble dependence on guidance from the Lord makes proclaiming His love a team effort - with the principal member of the team being Christ himself.

Of course, this causative way of relying on God's strength is valid in every aspect of our daily lives. It makes life's journey not only less stressful but a joy. Try it! It works! Oh Lord, cause me to grasp the message.

FR BARRY CAIRNS

Columban Fr Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.

Causative verbs have a hidden spirituality. They acknowledge our human frailty and rely on the strength of the Lord. We are all called to be missionaries and as missionaries, we are instruments of Christ's love, each in our own milieu. We never work alone.



MISSION WORLD

INTERNET TECHNOLOGY

A few years ago, I was visiting a traditional Fijian village. During my visit, we were sitting around on the floor of this Fijian thatched house, sharing yaqona or kava and telling stories. Then, quite unexpectedly, we could hear the familiar sound of a mobile phone! It belonged to one of the young men who were serving the kava.

This dial tone rang out a warning. Modern communications technology had crossed not just the surrounding hills but also centuries of technological progress. Even this isolated village in the hills of Fiji had become part of a global world.

I should add that while it could be interpreted as yet another example of neo-colonialism, the invasion of a traditional culture by Western hi-tech, on the other hand, some of the best websites I have come across have been produced by indigenous communities around the world. Pacifican websites can be exciting because Pacific islanders bring their native creativity to bear upon modern computer technology.

Recently, churches and religious leaders have been reflecting upon the impact of AI on society and the church. For example, there is an insightful document from the Vatican entitled “Antiqua et nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence” (January 4, 2025).

Central to this document is a section entitled “Specific Questions”. The first of these is the question of what AI contributes to society. Pope Francis once said, “the inherent dignity of each human being

and the fraternity (sic) that binds us together as members of the one human family must undergird the development of new technologies and serve as indisputable criteria for evaluating them before they are employed.” (Message for the LVII World Day of Peace - January 1, 2024) The second question concerns “AI and human relationships”. Use of AI should ensure respect for workers, for job security and just wages, as well as standing up for justice, peace, and integrity of creation. The third question concerns “AI and healthcare”. We need to ensure equal access to developments in medical healthcare. Next, in education, critical thinking should not give way to increased reliance on computer technology. This document then looks at the issues of “misinformation, deepfakes and abuse” and the need to promote peace rather than violence, truth rather than hatred and intolerance. There is also the question of our relationship to our “common home” because current AI models demand energy that can drain our limited resources and further damage our planet. A disturbing question is the connection between AI and warfare and the possibility of lethal machines operating autonomously. Finally, it looks at “AI and Our Relationship with God”. This reminds us that when it comes to reliance on AI, we are in danger of creating idols. We must always bear in mind that AI and computer technology is the work of human hands and can never replace the longing to deepen our relationship with God.

As missionaries living among people who maintain traditional ways of life, like the village in the hills of Fiji, I think we need to reflect further upon how AI or computer technology can help to enhance or impede the work of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

FR TOM ROUSE

Regional Councillor of Oceania

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE LEO XIV

March - For disarmament and peace: Let us pray that nations move toward effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.

April - For priests in crisis: Let us pray for priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

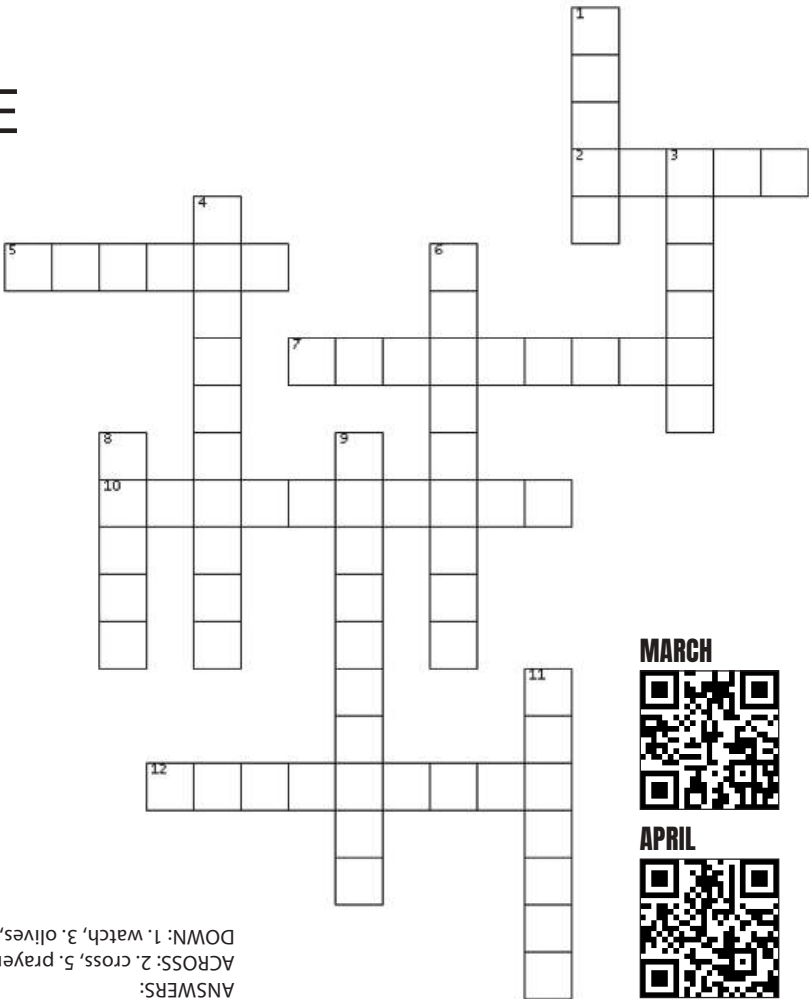
SCAN QR CODE to read the March & April 2026 Columban Calendar Art Guide and complete the crossword puzzle.

ACROSS

- 2. The burden Jesus carried to Calvary.
- 5. Communication with God.
- 7. Jesus’ offering of himself for humanity.
- 10. The garden where Jesus prayed before his arrest.
- 12. Followers of Jesus.

DOWN

- 1. Jesus asked his friends to do this with him.
- 3. Trees that characterise the Garden of Gethsemane.
- 4. Salvation brought through Christ’s sacrifice.
- 6. The holy city seen in the distance.
- 8. Jesus’ deep suffering in the garden.
- 9. A spiritual trial Jesus warned about.
- 11. The suffering of Christ before the crucifixion.



ANSWERS:
ACROSS: 2. cross, 5. prayer, 7. sacrifice, 10. Gethsemane, 12. disciples
DOWN: 1. watch, 3. olives, 4. redemption, 6. Jerusalem, 8. agony, 9. temptation, 11. passion



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'Do what you can' Bishop Edward J Galvin



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