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AUSTRALIA
St Columbans Mission Society
69 Woodland Street
Essendon Vic 3040

Postal address:
PO Box 752, Niddrie Vic 3042
PH: (03) 9375 9475
E: TFE@columban.org.au
W: www.columban.org.au

NEW ZEALAND
St Columban's Mission Society
PO Box 30-017
Lower Hutt 5040
PH: (04) 567 7216
E: info@columban.org.nz
W: www.columban.org.nz

PUBLISHER
Rev Dr Patrick McInerney
Regional Director of Oceania

EDITORIAL
Fr Pat O'Shea
Mrs Maha Shawky

PROOFREADERS
Fr Kevin O'Neill
Fr Ray Scanlon
Fr Reg Howard

DESIGNER & ASSISTANT
Mrs Assunta Arena

Cover photo: Columban Frs Rafael Ramirez (right) and Dan Harding (left) with two adolescents as they set up the Botanical Gardens in Chile. Photo: Fr Dan Harding SSC

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OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS



Political correctness admonishes us "not to other the other"! The Gospel urges us to welcome the other. The first affirms our common humanity but wipes out differences; the second embraces differences while affirming our common humanity.

However, that does not mean that we are all the same. Others differ in age, size, sex, family, physical appearance, ethnicity, culture, nationality, religion and myriad genetic, social, economic and political factors. This otherness is not something we have caused - we haven't "othered" anyone. It is simply who we are. Humanity is diverse. The real issue is not "otherness", but how we respond to it.

When we look at others with anxiety, suspicion and fear, when we speak of them in pejorative terms and when we consider them somehow less worthy than ourselves, then we have denied our common humanity, our equal human dignity, our identical nature as being made "in the image and likeness of God" and our common vocation as equally beloved children of God. As proof of this claim, I note that all acts of violence begin with hate speech. When people are called "cockroaches", "brutes" and "less than human", then they are deemed "pests" liable to be exterminated! Both political correctness and the Gospel condemn prejudice, unfair discrimination, hostility and hatred of others. But the Gospel goes further: we are to welcome others.

Contrary to such dehumanising denigration, human decency invites us to approach others with open minds, open hearts and open hands. We are to welcome them, show them honour, respect and hospitality, especially the poor, the migrant, the refugee and the vulnerable.

In doing so, our hearts and minds will be expanded and our lives will be enriched. This is because we learn from others. And if you think about it, it is the only way we ever learn. If we live and mix only with our own kind, with our family and friends, with the like-minded, we will live in a silo, hearing only the echoes of our own voices. However, when we encounter others who are different, listen deeply and dialogue with them, we learn new ideas, new thoughts, new insights and new values. From this human perspective, others become our teachers and we, their students.

But there is an even deeper religious reason why others matter. I recently came across a 2004 article by Ron Rolheiser OMI titled *"Facing Otherness and Differences"*. He explains that in all the scriptures of the world's great religions, God is described as "Other". God is not of our world, belongs to the divine realm and is completely and utterly beyond us, as stated through the Prophet Isaiah: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:9). This complete otherness of God is what we mean in the Sanctus at Mass when we pray three times: "Holy, holy, holy".

Because God is Holy, that is, wholly Other, in the religious traditions of the world, the other is most often the bearer of God's revelation. In the Bible, the foreigner, the outcast and the rejected often prove to be God's Messengers. This was certainly the case with Jesus, the stone rejected by the builders who became the cornerstone (cf. Acts 4:11).

Moreover, the biblical tradition is clear: how we treat the widow, the stranger and the orphan shows whether or not we are doing what God asks of us. The Gospel makes this personal. Jesus comes to us in the guise of the other - the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner (cf. Mt 25:35–36) - and how we treat him determines our destiny. The other matters eternally. Following the example of Jesus, let us welcome the other - the stranger, the foreigner, the migrant, the refugee - into our lives and so enter into the all-embracing, all-inclusive love that is the Reign of God.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:9).

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY
Regional Director of Oceania

EVEN JUST ONE OF THESE CHILDREN



Sunday English Catechism Class Recognition Day, together with the catechist teachers and Columban Fr Ryu Sunjong Andrew and Columban lay missionary Joan Yap (back right)

"Even just one of these children" is the theme of this year's World Migrants and Refugees Sunday. It brings me back to the words of Scripture: Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children … (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

For many years, I have accompanied migrant families in Taiwan. Many are Filipino mothers married to Taiwanese men, or Filipino families who came to Taiwan for work. In accompanying these families, I have also grown closer to their children, especially through our catechism ministry. What began with only eleven children has gradually grown. Along the way, I have discovered that accompanying children is not simply about teaching them about God. It is also about learning to see God already at work in their lives.

Behind every child is a family with its own story, struggles and cultural differences, all of which can make teaching and sharing faith challenging. Yet despite these difficulties, I see in many parents a sincere desire to bring their children to church, guide them and help them grow closer to God. That desire, even when expressed imperfectly, touches me. In their own way, they are trying to pass on to their children the faith that has been important in their own lives.

Many of these children are growing up between cultures and, at times, between two languages. Some have Filipino mothers and Taiwanese fathers, while others have Filipino parents but are growing up and studying in Taiwan. They carry different cultural backgrounds, expectations and ways of communicating. At the same time, there is a generation gap - the world their parents grew up in is very different from the one these young people experience today.

And then there is technology! Sometimes it is difficult to encourage them to put down their phones, listen and participate in Mass.

I have also learned that children come to church for many reasons. Some come because their parents ask them to, some because they want to see their friends and others simply because they are curious or have nothing else to do. There are even times when parents offer them a reward for coming. There are moments when I simply sit beside them, almost like their "police", to keep them attentive.

But these moments also prompt me to ask: How can I help introduce God into their world? How can I help them discover that God is already present in their lives?

I have also learned that children come to church for many reasons. Some come because their parents ask them to, some because they want to see their friends and others simply because they are curious or have nothing else to do. There are even times when parents offer them a reward for coming. There are moments when I simply sit beside them, almost like their "police", to keep them attentive.

These questions also bring me back to my childhood. I did not fully understand God at Mass and my faith was imperfect. But that was where my journey began. Faith grew slowly through people, experiences and community. Perhaps it is the same for these children. Perhaps what seems small today can become meaningful in their lifelong journey of faith.

Over the years, I have seen some of these children become more involved in the church. They sing in the

Photos: Joan Yap

choir, play guitar, proclaim the responsorial psalm, serve at the altar and bring up the offertory. They join in Christmas plays, Lenten dramas, All Saints' Day activities and other celebrations. These may seem like small things, but for me they are precious moments. I feel joy when I see them participate, because through it they may be discovering a community where they belong and where they have something meaningful to offer.

Beyond liturgical celebrations, I also treasure the simple moments of sharing faith with them through Bible reflections and conversations. Their honest questions and stories often surprise me, reminding me that while I accompany them, they are teaching me and that God is already at work in their lives.

Because of this, I see catechesis as more than teaching prayers and Bible stories. It is about creating a space where they feel welcome, loved and free to ask questions, while patiently walking with them and trusting that God is working in ways we may not always see. It is also about helping them discover faith in a way that speaks to the world they live in - a world shaped by diverse cultures, languages, technology and new ways of seeing life.

As a missionary, I continue to learn this: they may forget our lessons, prayers, or activities and we may not see the fruits of our accompaniment. But perhaps they will remember that someone welcomed them, listened to them and made them feel they belonged. Perhaps they will remember that the church was a place where they could ask questions, discover who they are and encounter God.



Columban lay missionary Joan Yap with the children during their catechism class.

The words of Scripture, "Recite them to your children," remind me that faith is always something we receive and something we are invited to pass on. Yet, in accompanying these children, I have also learned that passing on faith is not simply about giving them answers. It is about walking with them patiently, listening to their questions, entering their world and trusting God to work in their lives.

And perhaps this is where "Even just one of these children" becomes more than a theme. It becomes a call to care for, accompany and help each child discover that, wherever they come from and whatever culture they are growing up in, God is already calling them by name. And perhaps, by welcoming even one of these children, we are welcoming Christ Himself.

JOAN YAP
Columban lay missionary Joan Yap, lives and works in Taiwan.



Columban lay missionary Joan Yap with the children during their catechism class.



Chungli Association of Immigrants and Families (CAIF) Children during our first Lenten drama presentation, "Jesus' Big Love Story".

THE GOOD OLD DAYS!

I understand that Britain was among the first regions in the Society of St Columban to explore the possibility of overseas lay missionary vocations.

Back in 1983 Fr Ray Collier helped develop the initial structures for welcoming lay people to work alongside ordained Columbans in East London. In 1988 Ray wrote: *Aware and convinced that the mission of evangelisation has been entrusted equally to the whole people of God, lay and clerical, we will actively encourage, facilitate and accompany the laity in taking their rightful place in the work of evangelisation. Lay missionaries are not optional extras.*

What began small in Britain, and in a few other Regions and Mission Units, grew stronger, and in 1994 the Society of St Columban officially established the Columban Lay Mission Program.

Over time, this program evolved from being priest-led to lay-led. It also developed from being a program of the Society of St Columban into the "Columban Lay Missionaries", an integral part of the Society of St Columban with lay missionaries signing long-term contracts that strongly emphasised partnership with Columban priests and lay missionaries as the preferred way of being on mission.

Teams of lay missionaries worldwide worked together and were visible in many RMUs, often attracting interest because of their youthfulness, the novelty of learning a foreign language and crossing boundaries, and their enthusiastic invitation to other laity.

AD GENTES, REVERSED, AND INTER-GENTES MISSIONARIES

For about three decades, hundreds of Columban lay missionaries crossed geographical boundaries for the sake of the Gospel. Women and men - both single and married - from 11 countries, took a leap of faith, often serving in deprived communities and living and working alongside the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalised in 14 Regions and Mission Units.

Peak years for the Columban Lay Missionaries, in terms of numbers, were towards the end of the nineties when there were 72 lay missionaries. Ten years later, this number had fallen to 51. The downward trend became even more pronounced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2022 there were 31 Columban lay missionaries worldwide. Today, the number stands at 17.

At the dawn of the new millennium, Britain was sending lay missionaries to the Philippines, Peru, Pakistan, Chile, and Korea. Many returned enriched by the life-giving experiences they had in those RMUs, which also enriched their home communities. Likewise, reverse missionaries came to Britain to share their experience of church and community from the Global South, including groups from the Philippines, Chile, and New Zealand.

Many lay missionaries served a single three-year term, while others committed to six years or more. Some dedicated more than half their lives to overseas mission - most of their working lives as missionaries. Many returned home and continued with their lives. Some lay missionaries stayed in their countries of assignment; some found love there, while a couple lost their lives and are still fondly remembered by the people they served.

In recent years, our understanding of mission has been gently shifting, moving away from the idea that it happens only "out there" in distant and remote places (ad gentes). Increasingly, we recognise that mission is not confined by geography (inter gentes). From mission ad gentes to mission inter gentes!

Perhaps mission is not simply about going elsewhere, but about being present - that is, attentive and committed - where we already are. In this way, the missionary call continues to unfold at home as much as anywhere else. This experience invites us to pause and reconsider what we mean by the crossing of boundaries aspect of mission.

A TURNING POINT

Today, the Columban Lay Missionaries (CLM) - like the Society of St Columban - is engaged in a process of discernment. It is a period of transition, calling for synodal transformation in mission. The words of the familiar song "You Must Love Me" from the Evita musical come to mind: "Where do we go from here?" The question lingers. Where is CLM being led?



Columban lay missionaries living and working in the Philippines welcome Columban lay missionaries visiting from overseas.
Photo: St Columbans Mission Society - Philippines

What is being asked of it? Who will go? These are all deep questions that require personal and communal discernment for Columban lay missionaries.

How can a multicultural and stretched group of lay missionaries address these pressing questions? Is there sufficient energy to go on? And perhaps more importantly, what future are we inviting others into?

At times, the challenges ahead seem insurmountable to me. Yet it is precisely here that I find myself returning to the words of 1 Corinthians 1:25: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." There is reassurance in remembering that we are not the first to stand at such a threshold. When our founders, Frs Edward Galvin and John Blowick, set out in 1918 to establish the Society of St Columban, they too must have faced daunting challenges. Yet they responded not necessarily with certainties but with the "foolish" trust to follow God's call to mission. Perhaps that's true for CLM too.

IT'S GOD'S MISSION

In looking back and looking forward, what remains clear to me is that no one can claim ownership of God's plan. We can make our best estimates, discern, and reflect, hopefully arriving at decisions that are deeply thought through and prayerfully grounded. This echoes the words from Bishop Oscar Romero's prayer "A Future Not Our Own", where we affirm that "we plant seeds that one day will grow … We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs".

I am not naïve; this reflection must consider the reality of CLM, with its challenges as well as its opportunities. However, I take comfort in knowing that many of my lay missionary companions who have gone before me have given their best in their assignments. They have also shared their joys, struggles, and vulnerabilities, all in an effort to make their places of mission better, fostering a more inclusive Church and a more peaceful world. Through their witness - and that of many others - we have grown in our care and concern for our wounded earth and the brokenness of humanity. And this has been the life I have chosen to live for the last 25 years!

Is it a Thanksgiving time? Or can CLM re-imagine itself?

NATHALIE MARYTSCH
Columban lay missionary, Nathalie Marytsch, lives and works in Britain.



Columban lay missionary Nathalie Marytsch, paints the face of a child during the Summer Open Day in Britain, September 2026.

Photo: Emma Darling

ELDERS OF HOPE: WITNESSES TO LIGHT IN BADIN PARISH



Columban Fr Elbert Balbastro with a catechist visits communities to celebrate Advent.

Life's darkness is often filled with uncertainty. Without light, it becomes difficult to move forward. People long to see even the faintest glow, for light gives hope and reassures us that the future is still worth walking towards.

Living in Pakistan for several years, I have seen how uncertainty shapes daily life. Political tensions with neighbouring countries, particularly India and Afghanistan, deeply affect the nation's stability and economic growth. Corruption, inflation and widespread poverty cloud the hopes of many families. For Christians living in a predominantly Muslim country, the darkness can feel even heavier. Persecution, oppression and social division brought about by the caste system are part of daily reality.

At times, it seems as though the light slowly fades before their eyes. Yet, during these challenges, I have witnessed a quiet but powerful faith. Many Christians in Badin Parish continue to persevere. Life's darkness may weigh heavily on them, but it does not stop them from seeking the light - not only for themselves, but for the generations who will come after them. Their determination speaks of a hope that refuses to be extinguished.

On the First Sunday of Advent, we light the first candle of the Advent wreath - the candle of hope. During Mass, we have a meaningful tradition of inviting senior citizens and elders of the parish to light this candle.

At first, this may seem ironic. One might assume that the youth, often seen as symbols of the future, should represent hope. But as we reflected more deeply, we realized that hope is best embodied by those whose lives have been marked by faithful presence, perseverance and commitment.

We see this hope in parents and grandparents who, despite poverty and countless hardships, remain steadfast in their responsibilities. They work tirelessly to send their children to school, believing in a future better than their present.

They teach the catechism at home, nurture faith in daily life and quietly mould their children to become committed Christians.

Through their sacrifices, the parish continues to live and grow. Watching these elders come forward to the

Photos: Fr Elbert Balbastro SSC

Their perseverance has borne fruit, becoming a living testimony that hope, when patiently nurtured, transforms lives. It is only fitting that these elders light the candle of hope.

altar to light the first Advent candle fills my heart with deep joy. Their lives tell a powerful story. Many of their children are now professionals and active contributors to the Christian community. Their perseverance has borne fruit, becoming a living testimony that hope, when patiently nurtured, transforms lives. It is only fitting that these elders light the candle of hope.

Their example inspires the younger generation to persevere, to remain faithful and to believe in the light even when darkness surrounds them. Their collective efforts - meeting the needs of their families, enduring hardship and committing themselves to a brighter future - are the reasons the community continues to walk in the light.

As Christmas draws near, I find myself reflecting with gratitude on the presence, perseverance and commitment of Mary and Joseph. Through their faithful response to God's call, our Saviour was born - the One who brings true hope into the world.

Life's darkness will always be part of the human journey. Yet Advent reminds us that light is never absent. The candle of hope in the Advent wreath calls us to be a loving presence for one another, to persevere in faith and to commit ourselves to doing good. In doing so, we help keep the light alive not only for ourselves, but for a more peaceful and hope-filled future.

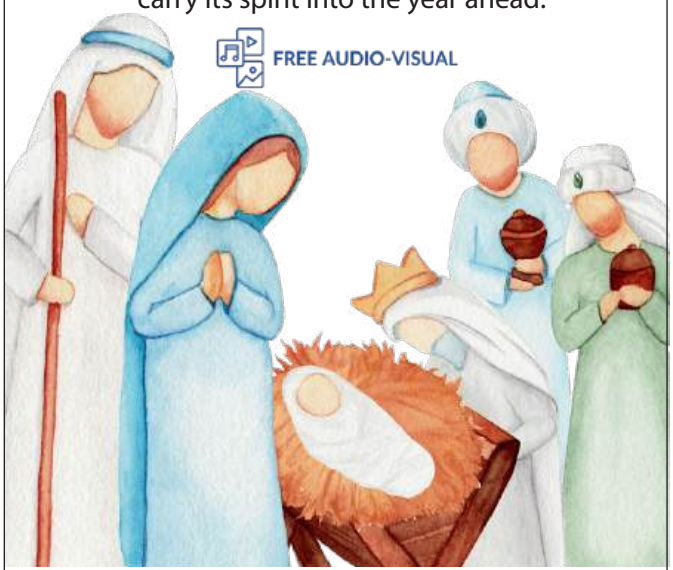
FR ELBERT BALBASTRO
Columban Fr Elbert Balbastro lives and works in Pakistan.



ORDER NOW - PRAYER BOOK

THE GIFT OF
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PRAYERS OF HOPE, PEACE AND LOVE

Christmas is a season of joy, hope and God's love made present in the gift of Jesus Christ. In a world longing for peace, healing and renewal, Christmas reminds us that light shines in darkness and love can transform hearts and communities. The Gift of Christmas is offered as a companion for personal prayer and reflection during this Holy Season. May its words of faith, gratitude and encouragement help you enter more deeply into the mystery of Christmas and carry its spirit into the year ahead.



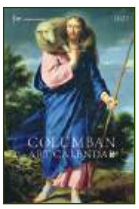
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2026 COLUMBAN SEASON OF CREATION SCHOOL COMPETITION WINNERS: **CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION!**

This year's Season of Creation School Competition received hundreds of entries from Catholic students across Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand.

Inspired by the theme of Living Waters, drawn from the prophet Ezekiel's vision of water flowing from God's temple and growing into a deep river that brings life and refreshes the earth (Ezekiel 47:1-12), students reflected on the importance of water in God's creation and our responsibility to protect and care for it in all its forms.

The quality of entries from both primary and secondary students was outstanding. Through art, poetry, and written pieces, students expressed their care for creation and solidarity with all living things that depend on clean, life-giving water. Their work also highlighted the responsibility we all share to protect our rivers and waterways, rather than allow them to be damaged or depleted through exploitation and the unsustainable extraction of natural resources.

The entries were creative and thoughtful; it was clear that students took a great deal of effort to complete their work. This made judging particularly difficult, with strong entries across each category. The students' work was innovative, well thought out, and often beautifully presented, reflecting their understanding of God's Living Waters as a precious gift that we all have a responsibility to care for and protect.

Among the many outstanding entries was a nine-page, handwritten storybook titled *The Awakening of Faith*. The story follows a girl who stands up to an evil politician determined to destroy God's creation. Through a spiritual experience and her discovery of Living Waters, she finds the courage to challenge the politician and lead her community to an oasis, where they experience healing and reconnect with creation and the world around them.

Another entry was a turtle made from litter collected by a primary school student along Moonee Ponds Creek in Melbourne. It was a creative way of transforming rubbish into something meaningful while drawing attention to the importance of keeping our waterways clean.

A secondary school student submitted poetry that opened with words reminiscent of Psalm 23:

"I am a river
Its water guides me through the valley of the shadows of death
Through it, I may lay down in green pasture
It's energy washes over me and I am healed"

These different approaches showed how art, storytelling, and poetry can bring the theme of Living Waters to life and remind us of our shared responsibility to care for creation.

A heartfelt thank you to every student who took part in this year's competition. We truly appreciate the time, thought, and creativity you put into your entries, as well as your willingness to give it a go and share your ideas with us.

Huge congratulations to the 2026 Columban Season of Creation School Competition Prize Winners! You should all be incredibly proud of what you have achieved. Through your thoughtful words, powerful messages, and inspiring artwork, you have shown great imagination, appreciation, and compassion for the ways rivers and waterways bring life to the earth and all God's creation.

To all students, teachers, and school communities, thank you for being part of this year's competition and for encouraging young people to reflect on their relationship with God's creation.

We hope this experience inspires you to keep asking questions, sharing your ideas, and taking meaningful action to care for our common home. Remember, no matter how big or small, every action we take together can make a difference!

ADI MARIANA WAQA
Adi Mariana Waqa is the Regional Schools & Community Partnerships Coordinator in Australia.

SCAN QR CODE TO VIEW ALL WINNERS



FIRST-PLACE WINNERS BY CATEGORY

All other prize winners can be viewed online at: www.columban.org.au



LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Art** Winner - Eha, St Andrew's Primary School, Werribee, VIC - Grade 4

My understanding of the theme "Living Water" is that water is a gift from God that gives life and hope, and connects people with the environment...



UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Art** Winner - Sophie, Auckland Diocesan School, New Zealand - Grade 6

As the water surrounds everything; nourishing what it touches. The girl represents humanity and the images in the bubbles represent everything else...



UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Art & Written** Winner - Lucia, Holy Spirit Primary School, Carnes Hill, NSW - Grade 6

God's living stream flows bright and clear, it washes every fear away, his love is always drawing near, and guides my heart throughout the day...



UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Poetry** Winner - Jessica, Holy Eucharist Primary School, St Albans, VIC - Grade 5

It is essential to keep our water clean because, without it, humans, animals and plants would struggle to survive...



UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Essay** Winner - Leonardo, St Vincent de Paul Primary School, Strathmore, VIC - Grade 5



UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Art Model** Winner - Tobias, St Vincent de Paul Primary School, Strathmore, VIC - Grade 5



SECONDARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Art** Winner - Elena, St Columba's College, Essendon, VIC - Year 7

Konichiwa
Bonjour
Hallo
Mrhban
Aloha
Ola
I live
I die
I am a river...



SECONDARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Poetry** Winner - Eniola, St Columba's College, Essendon, VIC - Year 7

She smiled. Her mother and father were sitting at the table getting ready for dinner. She sat in the middle of them. This was one of the rare occasions they were...



SECONDARY SCHOOL

1st Place **Essay** Winner - Sophia, St Columba's College, Essendon, VIC - Year 7



Damage to the Sacred Heart of Jesús parish roof as a result of the floods.

MORE RAIN THAN IN THE LAST 100 YEARS

Columban Martin Koroiciri is the parish priest of the Sacred Heart of Jesús parish in the city of Alto Hospicio. He shares his experience of the climate emergency and natural disaster that occurred recently in his parish and across the north of Chile and south of Peru.

Living in the city of Iquique in the community of Alto Hospicio, it is common to have camanchaca (mist) every day from around 7 am and again at 7 pm, where clouds of heavy mist come and cover the roads and houses. But what happened recently was a heavy downpour of rain and mist never seen in this area for a hundred years. The effects were startling:

On Wednesday, August 12, we observed heavy mist coming in and covering the whole of Alto Hospicio as expected, but within a few hours that mist had turned into rain and kept pouring until morning.

By Friday 14, some of the roads were flooded, and some of the roads within Alto Hospicio faced water damage and traffic jams. I went on Thursday to the market to buy some meat and vegetables, which should have been a five-minute drive but turned into an hour and a half with all the traffic that was arriving from Iquique through diverted roads and closed highways.

The mist and rain were so strong that we postponed two meetings in the parish, a workshop for the Diocese, and Mass in one of our chapels. Thankfully, we managed to celebrate Mass on Friday, but the lights went out in the whole block, so we had to celebrate in the dark with a couple of candles and some torches. About forty people attended the Mass, so I am glad that people were still faithful despite the weather.

On Saturday afternoon, we started receiving photos and videos of the damage in our chapels. In Sacred Heart, the lights and the ceiling collapsed because of rain entering from the roof.

In Santa Teresa church, two sections of the ceiling collapsed, and most of the floor was covered with water and dirt. Even the benches and some of the materials and hymn books in the church were dampened.

Photos: Fr Martin Koroiciri SSC

By Sunday afternoon, all the main highways going to Iquique had been closed because of the heavy traffic and landslides, and some of the roads had collapsed from the heavy rain. This resulted in thousands of people walking from Iquique to Alto Hospicio, around 16 kilometres distance and from sea level to 600 metres altitude.

On Monday, one of my parishioners called to ask if we could help a couple of people who were forced to sleep on the streets in the heavy rain. We took some blankets, soup, and coffee to them and took time to chat and even pray with them. We then made sure they had a warm place to sleep that night. I came back home around 2 am, feeling tired, but it was worth it.

At our parish house, the water started seeping in from the second floor through the staircase and flooded our driveway. It then flowed into our chapel and eventually into my room, which is right beside the chapel. It was a cold and worrisome night, but I am just glad we made it through.

SOME CONTEXT

Alto Hospicio is located on a plateau in the Atacama Desert, 600 metres above its twin city on the coast, Iquique.

According to the University of Chile, Alto Hospicio is characterised by "extreme aridity, with less than 2 millimetres of annual rain, which is the lowest figure in all South America".

According to Mayor Patricio Ferreira, this made Alto Hospicio completely unprepared for the El Niño weather event, with "more rain than in the last 100 years". The tens of thousands of homes and businesses in Alto Hospicio were all affected, one way or another, by the intense rain.

The National Prevention of Disasters Service reported that from Thursday, August 13th, until Tuesday, August 18th, more than 40 mm of rain fell on the region where Alto Hospicio is located, causing floods, mudslides, sinkholes, and collapsed roofs in buildings, houses, and churches.

WHAT DOES GREENPEACE CHILE SAY?

"Climate change is occurring in Chile with a series of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, wildfires, severe storms, water sprouts, heavy rain causing floods, mudslides, sinkholes, etc. These extreme weather events are exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon out in the Pacific Ocean."



Reaching out to homeless people during the natural disaster weather event in Alto Hospicio.

All the heavy winter rain (June to August) in Chile's central and southern zones will cause massive vegetation growth during spring (September to December), which will then dry out during the hot, dry summer months (December to March) and become fast-burning fuel, causing an elevated risk of wildfires in February and March 2027.

According to the National Chilean Forestry Corporation (CONAF), the number of forest fires in Chile has increased 17 times in the last 50 years. Forest fires have become more frequent, more extensive, more extreme, more destructive, and more difficult to control.

Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia are also affected by the El Niño weather phenomenon, registering heavy rain, flooding, and severe damage.

FR MARTIN KOROICIRI
Columban Fr Martin Koroiciri lives and works in Chile.

WATCH

2026 Columban Christmas Appeal video

This Christmas, your generosity can help bring hope, dignity and practical support to communities around the world.



Columban Fr Martin Koroiciri featured in this video.

TOUGH LOVE IN PAKISTAN



Columban Fr Pat Visanti living and working in Pakistan.
Photo: Fr John Boles SSC

Columban Fr Pat Visanti from Fiji has spent 10 years as a missionary in Pakistan. He is now the parish priest and manager of the parish school in Badin in Sindh, about three hours by car from Karachi. The parish compound contains the church, priests' house, a primary school hosting a few hundred children, 60% of whom are Muslim, and a tuberculosis (TB) clinic that is the responsibility of his assistant, Fr Elbert Balbastro, a Filipino Columban. The church compound is in the city, but many of the parishioners live in outlying villages.

Fr Pat found life in Pakistan frustrating at first. Some of my parishioners see the foreign priest as a millionaire who has inexhaustible riches. If, in some instances, I refuse to give, they get angry with me. I was shocked to find that some men who came weekly to the parish for help end up getting more money than the teachers in the parish school. So, I asked them to do some work in the parish compound and I would pay them for that. I was upset, too, to find some slackers lounging around in their village during the rice harvesting when work was readily available.

He explained, "They got used to receiving charity from the Columban priests in the past when they had nothing. Now even when some people are relatively well off, they still expect the priests to give handouts."

Fr Pat always helps with education and health care. But if someone comes repeatedly seeking handouts, he asks many questions. If convinced that they are in genuine need, he prefers to give food rations rather than money, which could be used for buying alcohol.

When Fr Pat began to carefully discern the requests made of him, he was disliked at first. But as he stood by his principles and continued to impress upon them their responsibilities, the people began to accept him. They even began to contribute to the parish. For example, they donated a rug for the church sanctuary. The priests thanked them sincerely and they felt proud of their gift.

He explained, "They got used to receiving charity from the Columban priests in the past when they had nothing. Now even when some people are relatively well off, they still expect the priests to give handouts."

Fr Pat is very happy when poor young people achieve good qualifications. A teacher's daughter won a scholarship to Hungary. She is now studying there for her master's degree in dietetics and physiotherapy. She has become a great example to parishioners and has motivated others to study hard to achieve. At present, through the Columbans, he is paying for the nursing courses of two students. He was delighted when one young man requested support to study a lab technician course and offered to work part-time in the parish TB clinic.

Some interreligious dialogue is possible through the school. Fr Pat gets to know the Muslim parents and encourages them to continue educating their children. He and the teachers all emphasise the equality and dignity of all people. The morning prayer at the school

alternates between Muslim, Hindu and Christian prayers. So far, there have been no complaints. He would like to be able to employ more teachers and to extend the education of the poor.

Fr Pat is an accomplished musician and composer. He has been appointed director of Radio Maria, called the "Voice of Mary" in Pakistan. The radio will soon be cloud-based and available through the internet. Surprisingly, even most of the poor Pakhari Kohli people have touch phones and internet is accessible and affordable.

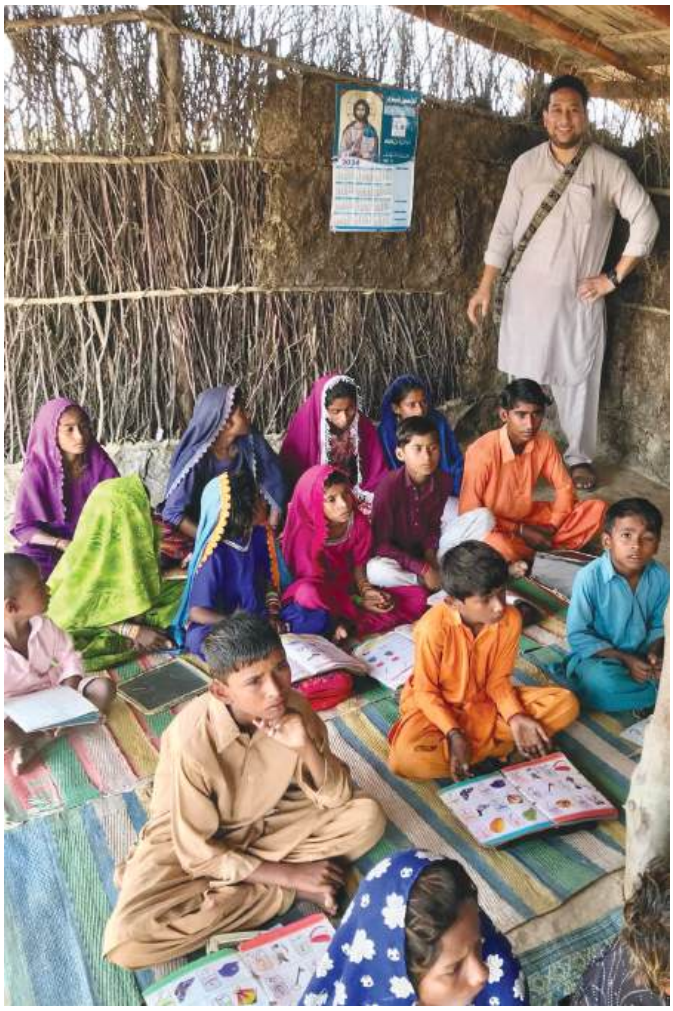
One of the difficulties for foreign priests is security. Foreigners in Pakistan are sometimes attacked because locals in the resource-rich regions suffer from extreme poverty while outside corporations and federal authorities pocket the profits. The missionaries have resisted state pressure to employ bodyguards, but they have to notify three different security agencies if they leave the parish for any reason. They must again report on return. Faithfulness in reporting is an issue when missionaries apply to renew their annual visas. Visa conditions include avoiding participation in protests and a ban on making converts from Islam. At the Muslim festival of Eid, the priests send cakes to the different security agencies and at Christmas the agencies respond similarly.

Badin is the most peaceful city in Pakistan. Fr Pat has never felt threatened there. Many Muslim friends in the town look out for him and check that he is all right. They are surprised and curious that he has chosen to live and work in Pakistan since they all want to leave and go overseas. The Pakistanis in general are a communal people who are very hospitable and, despite their poverty, appreciate life and greet you with a happy face.

Fr Pat finds God everywhere in Pakistan, even in the arid semi-desert of Sindh. He finds God especially in the people, Christian and non-Christian. His experience in Pakistan is such that he would love to work in Gaza, Afghanistan, or Iraq. He experiences the urge to go where most people would not want to go and discover God there.



Columban Fr Elbert Balbastro (back row second from right) with the community standing outside their newly built chapel - a space for prayer and a representation of hope. Photo: Fr Elbert Balbastro SSC



Columban Fr Pat Visanti assisting with educating young children in Pakistan. Photo: Fr Pat Visanti SSC

FR FRANK HOARE
Columban Fr Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



Columbans in Myanmar gather for their annual retreat with their retreat director Columban Fr Jovito Dales (second left) from the Philippines.

A LEAP OF FAITH

Contentment. That was my general feeling after graduating from college and getting a job in a bank in September 1990 in Ozamiz City, northwest Mindanao, Philippines, where I had lived for most of my life.

Almost seven years later, however, I began asking myself what a meaningful life really meant. That sense of contentment was disturbed and I found myself invited to make a leap of faith.

In 1992, Fr Frank Baragry, a Columban priest who introduced "silent prayer" to our community in Barangay Catadman, invited me to join a group that facilitated retreats in various Columban parishes. Through this experience, I became acquainted with other Columban missionaries.

They lived in a place we commonly referred to as the *palasyo* ("palace") because of its enormous size compared with the small houses around it. I remember standing in front of a mirror in one of its rooms and seeing only the tip of my hair!

"These missionaries must be giants to have a mirror placed this high," I quietly said to myself.

As I came to know them, I heard stories of courage, dedication and closeness to the local people. They shared their experiences of living among Filipinos during the Martial Law years and the difficult period that followed. Sometimes facing guns and life-

Photos: Fr Eamon Sheridan SSC

threatening situations, they chose to remain with the people they had learned to love.

I was filled with admiration. These missionaries - mostly Irish, North American, New Zealand and Australian - had left their families and loved ones and were willing to give so much of themselves in service of mission. Their example made me ask a radical question: How did I want to live my own life?

I was comfortable working at the bank during the week and helping with retreats on weekends. Yet the persistent question about the meaning of my life would not disappear. Eventually, it led me through a long, painful but liberating discernment and to saying "yes" to a calling that has brought me to where I am today - a Columban missionary priest for almost twenty years.

Looking back, I realise how much that decision changed my life and the way I see the world. There are no great achievements to boast about. Rather, my vocation has been shaped by ordinary experiences: living with people from different cultures, learning from them, sharing meals, celebrating fiestas and joining communities in prayer.

It is precisely this ordinariness that has given my vocation such meaning. I have learned to love people - their ways of life, their deep faith, simplicity, generosity and genuine friendship.

Yes, I left family and friends and have missed important moments: the birth of a niece or nephew, family celebrations and the funerals of close friends. Yet God has blessed me with new friendships and a wider Columban family.

Mission has helped me know myself more deeply and broadened my understanding of people of different faith traditions. It has also made me more aware of the struggles of migrants and of the immense challenge of climate change.

As I continue this journey, I often return to the well-known Serenity Prayer. God's plan continues to unfold through changes and unexpected turns and at every bend in the road I hear again the invitation to take a leap of faith:

"Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

FR JOVITO DALES

Columban Fr Jovito Dales lives and works in the Philippines.



Columbans in Myanmar gather for their annual retreat.



A FEW PROMINENT CATHOLICS, A FEW COLOURFUL CHARACTERS



Marquis Saionji Kinmochi

My first parish assignment after Japanese language school was at St Patrick's Parish in Toshima-Ku, Tokyo.

The priests lived in a house with a small garden behind the church. On a hot, humid Saturday afternoon, I decided to cut the grass and attack some of the kudzu vines that were threatening to overwhelm the other plantings. It did not take long for my shirt to become soaked with sweat. I looked up from my work, and a lady was standing there. She gave her name, "Saionji", and asked for Fr Scully, the pastor. I led her to a visitors' parlour and went into the kitchen to tell Oyama-san, the housekeeper, that there was a guest and to alert Fr Scully. Only when I witnessed Mrs Oyama's reaction did I realise our visitor was also known as Princess Saionji. She had a relative who had been a well-respected prime minister of the country and an elder statesman.

In 1919, former prime minister, Marquis Saionji Kinmochi, led the Japanese delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, though his role remained largely symbolic due to ill health. During the negotiations, Saionji proposed adding a "racial equality clause" to the Covenant of the League of Nations, but this met with strong resistance from the United States and Australia (both nations had their own forms of racial segregation at the time) and was not adopted.

Princess Saionji, despite such a distinguished background, was a totally unpretentious Catholic lady and a good friend to some of the Columbans who worked in the Shonan area near Sagami Bay. She also enjoyed sailing - just one of the colourful people who have been part of the Catholic Church in Japan.

Another was Kōtarō Tanaka, a Japanese jurist, law professor and politician who served as the last Minister of Education of the Empire of Japan and the second postwar Chief Justice of Japan. Takeda Tomoju, a scholar of Christian literature, asserted in a 1973 book review, "In postwar Japan, the most famous Catholics are Tanaka Kotaro and Fr. S. Candau." After studying in Japan, Europe and the United States, Tanaka Kotaro married Matsumoto Mineko, a devout Catholic, in 1924. Through her influence and his own interest in natural and canon law, he converted to Catholicism. Fr William Hoffman SJ the first president of Sophia University, baptised him in April 1926. Subsequently, Tanaka worked on a "theory of world law".



Tanaka Kotaro

In the final months of World War II, Tanaka joined a group of Japanese intellectuals who sought peace with the Allies and opposed Japan's militarist government. After the war, Tanaka was among the signatories of the new Japanese Constitution and was instrumental in drafting the Basic Education Law.

In 1950, Tanaka was appointed Chief Justice of Japan, serving until 1960. He was the first Christian to hold the position and drew on his international legal training to interpret the post-war Japanese Constitution. In 1961, he was appointed as a jurist on the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

Tanaka is best remembered today for a 1966 dissenting opinion on the South African practice of apartheid. Tanaka concluded that UN member states had "the legal obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms".

Tanaka died in 1974 at St Mary's Hospital in Tokyo, near his home, at the age of 83. He was a member of St Patrick's Parish, Toshima, Tokyo, which was founded and staffed by the Columbans.

Another Catholic legal expert who had a positive influence on the Japanese legal system was Gustave Emile Boissonade. Active during the Meiji period (1868–1910), he became known as the "father of modern Japanese law". Born in France in 1825, he received a doctorate in law from the University of Paris in 1853.

In 1873, he gave lectures on criminal and constitutional law to Japanese officials in Paris. Subsequently, he was invited to Japan to assist in creating a modern legal system for the country. He spent 21 years assisting the government and founded the Hosei Law School. He returned to France in 1895 and died in 1910.

Professor Boissonade and his wife, Henriette, also assisted the French missionaries in constructing the first parish church, St Joseph's, in Tsukiji, Tokyo, where Columban Fr Leo Schumacher is now the parish priest.

Along with other members of the French expatriate community, the Boissonades donated two French-made bells that rang at the original Church from 1878 to 1920. One of the bells, "Jeanne Louise de Yedo", is still at St Joseph's, where it is on display. The other, "Adelaide Josephine", is at Tokyo's St Mary's Cathedral.

Princess Saionji, despite such a distinguished background, was a totally unpretentious Catholic lady and a good friend to some of the Columbans who worked in the Shonan area near Sagami Bay.



Photo: canva.com/Şiyar AKBALIK

FR JOHN BURGER
Columban Fr John Burger lives and works in the USA.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25, is an opportunity to reflect on the impact of war and militarism on the lives of women and children in conflict zones.

For example, the horrific impact of the war in Gaza on civilians, especially women and children, is desperately sad and shocking. According to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees), hunger was used as a weapon of war, resulting in women and children scavenging for food. It suspended aid deliveries through the Kerem Shalom crossing, citing safety concerns whilst calling for an immediate ceasefire.

In 2024, UN chief António Guterres referred to the situation in Gaza as "appalling and apocalyptic", highlighting the devastating toll on women and children and the urgent need for international action. "Malnutrition is rampant … Famine is imminent. Meanwhile the health system has collapsed," he said. He referred to the blockade of aid not as a logistical issue, but as "a crisis of political will and of respect for the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law". During this season of Advent, we continue to remember and pray for the innocent people of Gaza and the victims of October 7.

Another example goes back more than seventy years, during and after the Korean War, when "camp towns" emerged around US military bases, populated largely by women engaged in sex work to serve American soldiers. This system was, at times, directly managed or tacitly supported by state and military authorities, with women often enduring stigma, poverty, discrimination and coercion.

STD (sexually transmitted diseases) control centres were established in the camp towns, mainly to protect the health of soldiers. The women involved were often treated as expendable, subjected to invasive medical procedures and dehumanizing treatment under the guise of disease prevention. Intended to control the spread of STDs, these policies often amounted



Former STD Control Centre. Photo: Fr Pat Cunningham SSC

to state "forced detention" with little regard for the women's rights. While most centres have now been demolished, one building remains in Dongducheon but is threatened with demolition as part of a tourism development initiative.

In response to a call for solidarity by the Joint Action Committee to Stop the Demolition of the Former STD Control Centre in Dongducheon, a weekly Mass has been organised by the Justice and Peace Committee of Uijeongbu Diocese near the control centre building next to Soyosan Subway station. The committee was formed because of growing consensus among civil society to preserve the former STD clinic. They insist that the centre should be utilized as a historical and cultural space to remember the history of violence towards the often forcibly detained women.

On the UN Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, this history reminds us that gender-based violence is not limited to physical and violent assault but includes societal mechanisms that devalue, exploit, and silence women. This highlights a clear power imbalance: women were objectified and placed in harm's way for the convenience and health of foreign troops, a dynamic underscored by militarised, patriarchal systems. The institutionalisation of such systems reflects how deeply embedded gender-based violence can become in societal and state structures, especially in militarised contexts.

The closure of most STD control centres and the reduction of US military presence in certain areas do not erase the harm done. Survivors and their descendants continue to bear the scars of this violence, physically and emotionally. Similar dynamics persist globally wherever militaries maintain large presences, making this an ongoing issue.

FR PAT CUNNINGHAM
Columban Fr Pat Cunningham lives and works in Korea.

THE OTHER SIDE OF GREEN

Kachin, in northern Myanmar, has long been known for its dense forests, green mountains and rich natural resources. Because the mountains are so steep, travelling between villages usually takes hours along winding roads.

These days, it is hard to even get a flight in or out because of the ongoing fighting. As the conflict worsens, ordinary people end up carrying most of the burden and worry.

A while ago, I had to see off the Myanmar Columban seminarians as they headed back to the Philippines to continue their studies after their home vacation. We could not get a flight to Yangon, where the international airport is, so we decided to drive them through the mountains to a safer town. On a map, it was not that far, but driving on rough, unpaved dirt roads took us a full day.

Even though the ride was tiring, I tried to relax and enjoy the green mountain views. But the view outside the window was nothing like what I expected. The green mountains were dug up everywhere, exposing raw, red earth. On the hillsides, hundreds of white PVC pipes were sticking out of the ground.

At first, I thought they might be for watering trees or for farming. But they were actually mining sites. Workers drill holes into the mountains and pump chemicals into the soil to extract the rare earth minerals.

I knew Kachin produced a large share of the world's rare earths; however, seeing it with my own eyes was heartbreaking. This method is cheap, but toxic chemicals seep into the ground and flow into the rivers. People living downstream can no longer drink the water they have used for generations. Many suffer from skin and kidney problems, and some have had to give up farming. Amid civil war, there is no real protection for the environment or local people.

What makes me feel heavier is that these hurt mountains are directly tied to our daily lives.



A resident of the mountain explains the hardships of life with Columban Fr Jehoon Augustine Lee (right).

The quiet electric cars on the road, wind turbines, and the smartphones in our hands all rely on these minerals. Technology, meant to cut carbon and protect the earth, is taking away the homes and health of the people living here.

Here in Kachin, resources often cause more conflict than help the community, and ordinary people are always the first to lose their livelihoods. When we hear the word "eco-friendly", we feel good about it. But true green living cannot be just about cutting carbon numbers. It should be about protecting nature, respecting human dignity, and not sacrificing our neighbours.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote, "Everything is connected". The red dirt of Kachin and the hard lives of the people here are connected to the clean, comfortable lives many of us enjoy. Riding that mountain road all day, I kept thinking about the local people here, quietly paying the price for the green future we dream of.

FR JEHOON AUGUSTINE LEE
Columban Fr Jehoon Augustine Lee lives and works in Myanmar.



Toxic runoff threatening the rivers, drinking water and local livelihoods.

Photos: Fr Jehoon Augustine Lee SSC

MISSION WORLD

MISSION AND HUMAN MAGNIFICENCE

A sense of urgency runs through Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*. He speaks as a child of the Modern Age, an Augustinian friar, and a missionary. Artificial intelligence came to life in his lifetime.

Augustine taught Leo to focus on God and, in doing so, to come to know the true magnificence of our humanity. As a missionary, he experienced the wonderful gift of cultural diversity and the call to true communion in Christ. But what has happened is that technology has progressed in leaps and bounds, far beyond what Leo, or any of us, could have imagined 50 or so years ago when Leo was growing up in Chicago and entered the friary. The speed is frightening to the extent that it frightens many of those who are at the centre of its progress.

As a young man, Robert Prevost would have witnessed the developments in computer technology. It has been extraordinary. From huge IBM machines that occupied considerable floor space to iPads and laptops that fit in one's backpack. But it is the data processing that is more alarming. Computers replace hundreds and thousands of workers because they are far more efficient and complete tasks at a far greater pace. They now determine what actions need to be taken to correct possible errors that occur in an industrial plant or a government department, often without human intervention

Let Pope Leo speak for himself. "What can be stated, however, is that we must avoid the misconception of equating this type of 'intelligence' with that of human beings. These systems merely imitate certain functions of human intelligence. In doing so, they often surpass human intelligence in speed and computational capacity, offering tangible benefits across many fields. Yet this power remains entirely tied to data processing. So-called artificial intelligences do not undergo experiences, do not possess a body, do not feel joy or pain, do not mature through relationships and do not know from within what love, work, friendship or responsibility mean. Nor do they have a moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil, grasp the ultimate meaning of situations, or bear responsibility for consequences." (99)

Reading this letter from Leo, it seems that he has been reflecting upon the impact of computer technology and AI for some time. In the introduction of this letter, he takes us back to the Bible and contrasts two images: that of the tower of Babel and the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem following the return from Exile. He is not speaking as a politician or as the head of a corporation; he is not guided principally by political expediency or by profitability. The Word of God is his starting point, and he chooses to listen to what that Word is saying to the issues confronting us in our present times, just as it did in the past. One image suggests a continual striving for what is better or greater by demanding that we all conform to the same system of communication. Respect for diversity and care for the least are out. The restoration of the wall recognised limitations in terms of what could be done and encouraged diversity of approach and language as a way of working towards a common goal.

I'd like to further explore what Pope Leo, in his reflections upon the impact of AI, is saying about what it means to be called to Christian mission in our world today. Stay tuned.

FR TOM ROUSE
Regional Councillor of Oceania

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE LEO XIV

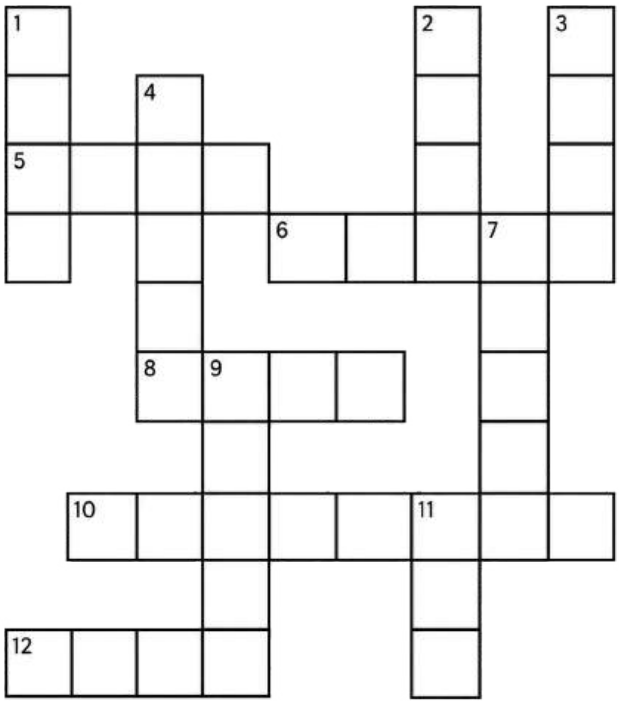
November - For the proper use of wealth: Let us pray for the proper use of wealth, that not succumbing to the temptation of selfishness, it may always be put at the service of the common good and solidarity of those who have less.

December - For single-parent families: Let us pray for families experiencing the absence of a mother or father, that they may find support and accompaniment in the Church, and help and strength in the Faith during difficult times.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

SCAN QR CODE to read the November - December Columban Calendar Art Guide and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

5. What precious metal was presented to Jesus?
6. Which gift symbolised Christ's future death and entombment?
8. What bird returned to Noah with a sign of hope?
10. What feast celebrates Jesus being revealed to all humanity?
12. What did the olive leaf represent for those in the Ark?

DOWN

1. Who travelled to Bethlehem to see the newborn Jesus?
2. What guided the Magi to Bethlehem?
3. Who built the Ark?
4. What natural disaster caused Noah to build the Ark?
7. What bird did Noah first send from the Ark?
9. What type of leaf did the dove bring back?
11. What vessel carried Noah, his family and the animals?

NOVEMBER DECEMBER

ANSWERS:
ACROSS: 5. gold, 6. myrrh, 8. dove, 10. epiphany, 12. hope
DOWN: 1. Magi, 2. star, 3. Noah, 4. flood, 7. raven, 9. olive, 11. ark

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'Do what you can' Bishop Edward J Galvin

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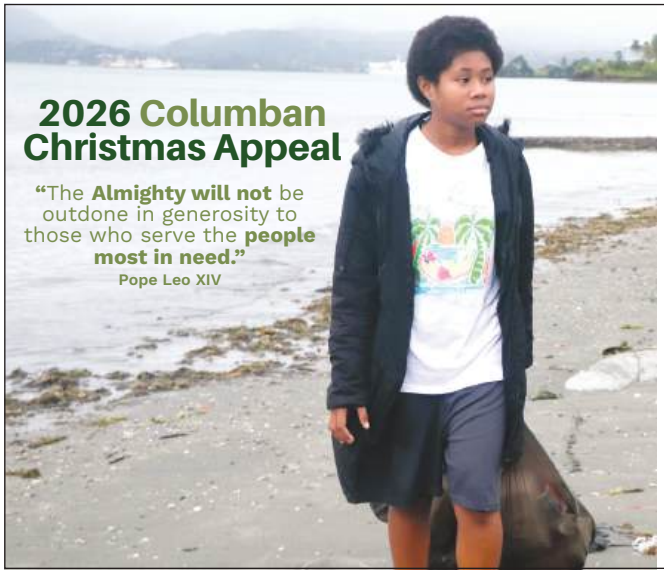
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In Fiji, Columban Mission brings young people together to turn faith into action. Along Suva's Nasese Foreshore, young volunteers joined Columban missionaries to remove plastic waste threatening precious mangroves and marine life. Afterwards, they gathered at the Columban Formation House to share a meal, reflect on *Laudato Si'* and learn about caring for creation. Your Christmas gift helps Columbans continue inspiring communities to protect biodiversity, support vulnerable people and build hope for our common home.

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