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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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PEACE THROUGH DIALOGUE

Social commentators observe that Australian society is now more divided than ever before. The Hamas terrorist attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the subsequent prolonged Israeli attacks on Gaza, and the continuing provocation in the occupied West Bank have polarised Jewish-Muslim relations. Social media accelerates and disseminates the animosity. Consequently, there has been an astronomical rise in both antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The anti-Jewish terrorist attack on Bondi on December 14, 2023, confirmed the Jews' worst fears and shocked and appalled us all. More than 20,000 written submissions were made to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion. Jewish community leaders have aired their grievances. Their accounts of antisemitism are shocking and harrowing. No one should be targeted by such racist words and actions.

However, the Commission's narrow focus on antisemitism, largely overlooking the wider dimension of social cohesion, means that the voices of other communities are not heard. This one-sidedness results in a perception of "exceptionalism" on the one hand, that one community's concerns are more important than others, and "alienation" on the other hand, that other communities' concerns are not given their due consideration. The media reports on the Commission's hearings inevitably broadcast this skewed impression, exacerbating the sense of division. Some community spokespersons escalate it even further by trying to discredit or delegitimise the other.

Populist politicians have fanned the flames of intolerance by promoting a monoculture that erases the richness and diversity of the many ethnicities, cultures, and religions that make up our multicultural, multifaith society.

How can we find hope in these hyper-contested times? In recent weeks, I have been privileged to be part of several events that give me hope.

The Abraham Conference hosted a "Listening Circle". A select group of 10 Jews, 10 Christians, and 10 Muslims came together. We listened to each other. There was no discussion, no comment, no debate. We simply listened. We spoke our truth. It was

emotional and heartfelt. We heard each other's pain and hurt. We recognised our similar suffering and our common humanity. There was deep bonding. It was a healing experience for all involved. There needs to be much more listening like this to diffuse the toxic animosity that is tearing the fabric of our society apart.

I was a participant in a "Social Cohesion Roundtable" hosted by Western Sydney University, which brought together leaders from government, policing, business, education, sport, faith, philanthropy, and community. There was open sharing about the economic, educational, social, and other stressors that lead to marginalisation, the many good things already taking place, and the need for greater cross-sector collaboration. Working groups will be established to formulate strategies to achieve positive outcomes. The Baha'i community hosted a Social Cohesion Roundtable on "Creating an Inclusive Narrative". It was good to see and hear the inclusivity and mutual respect among the participants from diverse backgrounds.

On two recent occasions, I have been invited to give talks on peace. I spoke on "Peace and Harmony in the Christian Faith" at an interfaith seminar at St John's Anglican Church, Padstow. I was guest speaker for the World Christian Leaders Conference's Webinar, "United for Peace: Christians in a Multi-Faith World". From these invitations, it is evident that people are hungering and thirsting for peace. From the Listening Circles and Roundtables, it is heartening that secular and religious parties are responding to the challenge. And Pope Leo's encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, addressed "to all the Catholic faithful, to all Christians and to all men and women of goodwill", provides a key remedy: respect for the "grandeur of humanity" through encounter and dialogue.

Faith assures us that God's peace will prevail. Let our daily prayer be, "thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Regional Director of Oceania



THE IMPACT OF SHIPWRECKS



"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my cry." (Psalm 130) Surely, this is the cry of our seas and oceans and it will continue to come from the depths!

There is continued sharing, planning and discussion about our care for our common earth and rightly so. But an aspect I am acutely aware of and one that many are unfortunately impervious to is the impact of shipwrecks on our seas and oceans. Thousands of ships have sunk throughout history. They are not all on the seabed. They are lying in our harbours, wedged in sand on our shores and drifting aimlessly like "ghost ships" on our oceans, reminiscent of the mythical supernatural ships in the novel *The Flying Dutchman*. And this will continue! I have been associated with the "Apostleship of the Sea-Stella Maris" for over thirty years and in recent times was appointed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) as National Director.

In this time, much has been experienced and much learnt in matters relating to "our people of the sea", Seafarers and, naturally enough, the Maritime Industry. Whilst fascinating, it is also very challenging and at times confronting!

I do not profess to be an expert on shipwrecks and their impact, so these are my personal thoughts and reflections. They may stimulate discussions among interested parties.

Growing up, I was fascinated by shipwrecks. It was the grandeur of ships past, the history, the countries, the battles fought, the fame and the fortune. Naturally enough, not every trip was "smooth sailing" - many crew and passengers were forced to set foot on ships that became vessels of horror, death, disease, uprootedness, shame and dominance.

Here in Victoria, our coastline is dotted with fascinating maritime stories. Wrecks abound. They may not be as numerous as they once were, but shipwrecks are nonetheless a reality of our modern times. What went to the bottom of the ocean was once wood and

Photo: canva.com/Mark Borsi

sail, fortunes and various goods. In our modern era, the wrecks now reveal something more sinister.

A once-glorious and simpler era has “stepped aside” for more modern, larger, faster and more powerful vessels. Now, our electronic and robotic age is all about business and service. Time is money. Some ships of our future will increase in size by half again. The average number of 25 crew members per ship will decrease. Time in any port will basically be a “drop-off and pick-up” industry development. While the future is unknown, one thing is certain: this change will have startling effects on our common oceans and seas as it will on our common earth. We must not forget ourselves - we humans will pay the price for our creativity! Sometimes my heart is full of guilt about the future; my mind is full of bewilderment and, above all, there is deep-seated frustration.

Why? A shipwreck is not just a shipwreck. Whether it be a small leisure craft, yacht, cruiser, a barge, leading up to the larger oil and gas tankers, bulk carriers, container ships and car carriers, if any one of these is a victim of the forces of nature, human error, abandonment, piracy and the like, then that which lies on any beach, floats in any ocean or sea and even that which plunges into the depths will cast its net of destruction, contamination and fear.

A vessel grounding can damage a coral reef; the dragging of an anchor can destroy marine flora and fauna. Leakages and spills can initiate varying degrees of pollution and death. We know from history how oil spills, in addition to taking forever and a day to clean up and control, affect our ecosystem almost to the point of no return.

Hazardous materials such as heavy metals (copper, nickel), asbestos and the many and varied chemicals used in shipbuilding and all maintenance procedures, the paint ... all of these basically get weathered into our environment in due course, gradually leaching into the water and then into the soil; obviously, the beaches get contaminated, too.

Yes, ships and boats are at the mercy of tides and waves - but of us also. We can and must do something. We must not get caught in the nets of complacency; we must not get tied down by the ropes of denial, nor must we be consumed by the “flotsam and jetsam” that floats in our daily lives. Rusted machines and equipment will only poison our attitudes and actions and eventually we might come to a grinding halt.

Caring for our earth, caring for our ecosystem ... caring for Life, caring for potentiality! We forget that destroyed or polluted environments will very quickly affect seafood stocks. Fish may be poisoned, putting the health and well-being of all at risk. Socio-economic ramifications would bring financial loss to fishing communities. Tourism, which relies on clean beaches and aesthetic environments, would fail and marine attractions cease to exist or be valued and appreciated. The domino effect of such degradation and loss may be devastating.

We are victims of our modernity and like most things in our lives and world today, we and everything around us are under threat. Personal stewardship has to be partnered with environmental stewardship if we are to realise more fully the gifted creation and the relationships we should have with every person who walks our mother earth.

Let us strive to give and receive life and not allow anyone or anything to deny its fullness. The challenge and reality are before us.

It is not good enough to “be”. In all matters of life and relationships, no matter who or what, we must continually “become”. We are challenged to grow with the needs and the times and adjust accordingly to what is right and just. If not, then we will be swamped and no longer able to launch out into the deep.

The Lord holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the highest mountains as well. He made the sea; it belongs to him, the dry land, too, for it was formed by his hands. (Psalm 95)

Let us strive to give and receive life and not allow anyone or anything to deny its fullness. The challenge and reality are before us.

FR TONY COX

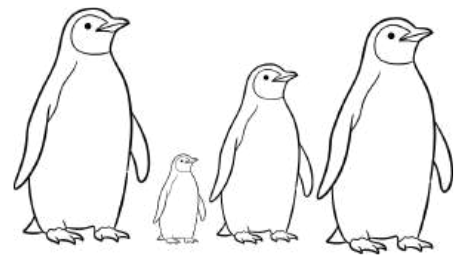
Columban Fr Tony Cox lives and works in Australia.

Sea Sunday - July 12, 2026

SCAN QR to read Message from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for Sea Sunday 2026.



ENHANCING ECOLOGICAL CONVERSIONS IN CHILE



One of the most exciting and dynamic global Columban programs is the Society Invitation to Mission (SIM) program, which offers interested persons hands-on, short-term, interactive mission experiences with Columban missionaries living in other cultures. These experiences can run from several weeks to a year.

During 2026, the Columban Mission in Chile sponsored two SIM programs that ran concurrently. From Ireland came Dan Rooks, a young man seeking a mission experience with the Columbans in Chile, during the winter months of June and July. And from Peru, for 16 days at the end of June and the beginning of July, came eight young adult catechists and youth leaders from the Columban parish of San Marcos Apostol in Lima, also seeking a mission experience. The theme of the two SIM 2026 experiences in Chile was: *"Enhancing our ecological conversions - Living with a Creation Spirituality"*.

In Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* - On Care for Our Common Home, he reminds us that all Christians need an: *"ecological conversion, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them."* And: *"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience."* *Laudato Si'* no. 217

An "ecological conversion" involves recognising God as the Creator of all and seeking to connect with and be in relation with the rest of God's sacred creation and: *"acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart."* *Laudato Si'* no. 218

We need to commit ourselves to action and to becoming good stewards of God's creation.

ENHANCING AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN SAN MATÍAS PARISH IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

During the first week of the Winter School Holidays in Chile, at the end of June, 70 school-aged children and adolescents gathered each day for a week-long Creation Spirituality program in the Columban parish of San Matias in Santiago. This parish is located in a socio-economically impoverished and marginalised area where families struggle with poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and criminal violence.

The children were divided into four groups with local parishioners and the nine SIM participants as their guides for the entire week. Each group was named after a native Chilean animal - Chungungos (marine otters), Pudus (native Chilean deer, the world's smallest), the Monito del Monte (a small native Chilean marsupial), and the Martín Pescador (a native Chilean Kingfisher).

The catechists and youth leaders from San Matias parish, as well as the SIM participants from Ireland and Peru and the three participating Columban priests (Frs Dan Harding, Rafael Ramirez and Pepe Seong) led the children during the week in a variety of activities.



Columban Fr Dan Harding (left) aboard the ship to visit the penguins, the sea lions and the marine otters with the children and Columban Fr Iowane Gukibau (right).

"All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of our creatures. You embrace with tenderness all that exists." A Prayer for the Earth - Laudato Si'.



Aboard the ship to visit the penguins, the sea lions and the marine otters.

These activities included planting native Chilean trees and shrubs in small botanical gardens that they had created, going on nature walks in a nearby park to see hummingbirds and many other bird species, visiting a local zoo to see the native animals there, and visiting the Natural History Museum to see displays of Chile's many distinct ecosystems. There was a lot of art, music, song, drama, and dance in which the children were able to express their love and stewardship for all other species, who are all our fellow companions in God's Holy Creation.

One of the highlights of this Creation Spirituality week included the several celebrations of the Eucharist and other liturgies that offered thanksgiving and praise to God the Creator for the gift of creation, a sense of communion with other non-human inhabitants of creation, repentance for the harm done to God's gift of creation, and concrete ideas and actions on how to change and become good stewards of creation.

LET US GO AND SEE THE PENGUINS, THE SEA LIONS AND THE MARINE OTTERS

Following the children's Winter School Holiday program, the nine SIM participants (from Peru and Ireland), along with Frs Dan Harding and Rafael Ramirez, participated in a week-long Creation Spirituality Retreat at the Columban house at Algarrobo on the Pacific Ocean coast. These were the five main elements of the retreat:

1. Connecting with the world, to be in communion with God's Holy Creation

We were asked to spend time in silence, connecting with the world - with the towering snow-capped Andes Mountain Range in the distance, the Pacific Ocean in front of them, the coast, the wetlands, the forests, the deserts and the sky: *"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs". Laudato Si' no. 1, Canticle of St Francis of Assisi.*

2. Connecting with and being in communion with all of God's Holy species

On a boat trip to an offshore island near Algarrobo, we viewed two penguin colonies - Humboldt and Magellan - as well as sea lions, marine otters, and dozens of migratory bird species. *"All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of our creatures. You embrace with tenderness all that exists." A Prayer for the Earth - Laudato Si'.*

3. Acknowledging how we have harmed God's Creation - Laudato Si' no. 218

4. Offering the Eucharist, prayer, liturgies, art, poetry, dance, music, drama, quiet time alone

Offering in prayer to God the Creator all our reflections and gifts to be used as stewards as we commit ourselves to caring for our common home.

5. Deciding on the next steps

How do we carry the fruits of this ecological conversion back to the parish in Lima? What concrete activities are we committed to? Through our two recent Columban SIM programs in Chile, we have pushed the horizons of what a short-term Columban missionary experience can be about. Amongst many other things, it can also mean going to see the penguins, the sea lions and the marine otters and having a sense of communion with them - as fellow creatures of our Creator God.

FR DAN HARDING

Columban Fr Dan Harding lives and works in Chile.

REFLECTION

WALKING WITH THE SAINTS



Columban Fr John Boles admiring a modern-day statue in Durham, depicting monks rescuing the uncorrupted body of St Cuthbert from Lindisfarne as Viking raids threatened the island.

“Lindisfarne is magical, especially when you’re going there barefoot.”

This advice from local pilgrimage organiser Rachel to Columban Frs Kevin McDonagh, Tim Mulroy and me had a double meaning. While pilgrimages worldwide often have stretches where pilgrims go barefoot as a sign of faith or penance, in this case we had a very practical reason for shedding our footwear: Lindisfarne, in England’s Northeast, sits on an island ... and there is no bridge!

Nowadays, traffic can pass over a causeway visible at low tide. But pilgrims traditionally prefer to go the way used by Christians for nearly one-and-a-half thousand years, treading a route that leads straight across a couple of miles of wet sand, following a line of posts that often rise eerily above the all-too-common coastal mists.

We Columbans had a threefold motivation for joining this unique, semi-aquatic pilgrim trail, given our close friendships with the three participating groups: the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle (one of the dioceses kind enough to facilitate Columban Mission appeals); the Archbishop Romero Trust (St Oscar Romero being very close to the hearts of so many Columbans); and CAFOD (the Catholic Association for Overseas Development), a vital partner in countless Columban social welfare initiatives.

Also, for me, this was personal. Back when I was a student at the University of Hull, I spent many a glorious day hiking the hills, coasts and pilgrim trails of the Northeast. During my years as a Local Government officer and committed young Catholic adult in the 1970s, my hero and role model was Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador in El Salvador, Central America. (It was his murder on 24th March 1980 that

Photos: Fr Tim Mulroy SSC

The deaths of Oswald and the Lindisfarne monks echo the sacrifice of Christ, and of all who come after them and suffer for the cause of Justice and Truth - represented in our times by the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero.

inspired me to become a missionary in Latin America, first as a lay volunteer in Nicaragua and later as a Columban priest in Chile and Peru.) Finally, just before joining the Columbans, I'd spent two enriching years doing voluntary promotional work with CAFOD.

All this came back to me as my fellow pilgrims and I wove our way through the coastal shallows from the mainland to the Holy Isle. It was easy to feel you were walking in the company of saints as the silence descended, broken only by the lapping of waves, the calls of seabirds, the squelching of feet on the sand and the occasional low hum of prayer and conversation. As for saints, Lindisfarne has had more than its fair share. Indeed, the Christian conversion of much of Northern England sprang from here.

By the early Middle Ages, the east and south of Britain had been carved up between competing non-Christian Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (an area becoming known as "Angle-land" ... England). Then, a young prince of the Kingdom of Northumbria named Oswald, who spent a period in exile among the Irish, became a Christian. On acceding to the throne, he decided to Christianise his kingdom. He entrusted the task to an Irish monk from Iona named Aidan, whom he made abbot, bishop and missionary in a monastery on Lindisfarne Island in 634. Aidan was spectacularly successful in all three roles until he died in 651.

An equally charismatic individual followed him in 665 - Cuthbert, who variously served as monk, abbot, bishop and hermit until his death in 687. By now, Christianity was spreading throughout the region and monasteries were appearing all along the coast, the most notable being the two established by Biscop on Wearside and at Jarrow, both of which served as home for Bede the Venerable (673–735): the "Father of English History".

Saints Oswald, Aidan, Cuthbert, Biscop and Bede the Venerable were spiritual heavyweights in a tiny area over a mere century: an impressive array of saints by any standard. Yet it wasn't prayers concerning any of them we heard along the way, but readings connected to the twentieth-century Latin American saint, St Oscar Romero. Why?

Well, because the story of Lindisfarne is not just one of triumph but also of suffering. In 651, King St Oswald was brutally killed and dismembered by Offa, the

pagan monarch of neighbouring Mercia. (Tradition has it that Oswald's head lies in Durham Cathedral. Near to the spot there is a statue of a decapitated man holding a crowned head under his arm!) Then, in 793, Lindisfarne became the first English settlement to fall victim to the Vikings. The monastery was rebuilt but continued to be attacked and its monks slain until, in 875, the monks eventually abandoned the site, carrying away the body of St Cuthbert, which also found a final resting place in Durham Cathedral.

The deaths of Oswald and the Lindisfarne monks echo the sacrifice of Christ and of all who come after them and suffer for the cause of Justice and Truth - represented in our times by the martyrdom of St Oscar Romero.

Romero knew he was putting himself in danger when he accepted the role of Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. He knew he would inevitably clash with the cruel militarised regime that was oppressing El Salvador at the time. His weekly radio homilies denouncing human rights abuses enraged the authorities just as the parables of Jesus enraged the Chief Priests and Pharisees. His calls for the United States to suspend arms sales to his country and for soldiers not to fire on civilians, effectively signed his death warrant. Yet even before they shot him while celebrating Mass, he'd forgiven his would-be murderers, while foreseeing he'd rise again in the hearts of the people. It was for this reason, as I walked out of our Closing Mass at Lindisfarne's St Mary's Church, that I felt Oswald, Aidan, Cuthbert, Biscop and Bede were walking with us and accompanying the pilgrims as we sang, "*Like Romero we will serve you and whatever may befall, we'll devote ourselves to justice and the common good of all*".

FR JOHN BOLES

Columban Fr John Boles lives and works in Britain.



Columban Fr John Boles (right) and other pilgrims following the trackway across the sands.

THE OTHER SIDE OF MIGRATION: THE CHILDREN WHO WAIT

In 2009, I spent a couple of months immersing myself in communities in Mindanao where families of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) lived. I felt it was important to understand the lives of those left behind so I could more effectively accompany and pastorally support the OFWs I was blessed to journey with during my assignment in Taiwan. While much attention is often given to migrant workers abroad, I wanted to listen to the stories of the spouses, children, parents, grandparents and relatives who carry the weight of separation at home.

Those months opened my eyes to the hidden sacrifices behind every departure. I encountered families living with both hope and loneliness, grateful for the opportunity migration provided yet struggling with the emotional costs of prolonged absence. I listened to children speak about parents they saw only on screens, spouses who carried the responsibilities of family life alone and grandparents who stepped into parental roles, or the eldest child taking on a parental role. The stories I heard then have stayed with me and continue to shape my understanding of migration, family and ministry.

On the other hand, I have met families who have become dependent on regular remittances from their loved ones overseas. In some cases, they stop working and rely solely on this support. I have also observed that the steady flow of money can blur the line between wants and needs, leading to unnecessary spending and unrealistic expectations. This highlights the need for responsible stewardship, financial literacy and shared family responsibility alongside the sacrifices of OFWs.

The experiences of OFW families are far from isolated. They are part of a reality affecting millions of Filipinos. According to data from the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), nearly 7,000 Filipinos have been leaving the country each day in recent years, in search of work and opportunities abroad. Behind these numbers are mothers and fathers saying goodbye to their children, husbands and wives enduring years of separation and young people learning to navigate life without a parent's daily presence.

While labour migration has contributed significantly to the Philippine economy and improved the material conditions of many families, it has also created a generation of children who silently bear the emotional costs of separation.

Now that I am assigned to my home region of the Philippines, those experiences have taken on deeper meaning. I have long hoped to start a support group for the children of OFWs. Although there is growing recognition of the need to support these children, establishing a dedicated program in our area has not yet become a pastoral priority. The stories and experiences of these young people remind us that their needs are real and deserve our attention.

I hope this ministry can help fill that gap and provide a space where they feel seen, heard and accompanied. Such a ministry would not only support their emotional and spiritual well-being but also affirm their dignity and strength as they navigate life with one or both parents working abroad.

Having been here on Negros Island for a year now, I no longer hear these stories only through interviews and conversations. I witness them in the lives of the people around me. One experience remains deeply etched in my memory. A neighbour who had worked abroad for many years finally came home - but not in the way her family had dreamed. She arrived inside a coffin.

Like many OFWs, she left home carrying hopes of providing a better future for her loved ones. Instead, they were met with grief and loss, a painful reminder that behind every migrant worker is a family whose lives are profoundly affected by the risks and sacrifices of migration.

Another story that touched me deeply was about a mother who left her three-year-old daughter to work overseas. The child was too young to understand why her mother had to leave. She could not grasp the economic pressures that forced such a difficult decision. She only knew that the person who hugged her, eased her fears and tucked her into bed each night was suddenly far away. Her story reminded me that migration often forces parents to make heartbreaking choices, choosing between being physically present for their children and providing the resources their children need to survive and thrive.

Yet amid these struggles, I have also witnessed remarkable examples of love and commitment. One such story involves a woman who cared for her girlfriend's child while her girlfriend worked abroad. Though not bound by blood or marriage, she embraced the responsibilities of parenthood and became a stable presence in the child's life.

I was also moved by the story of a student who celebrated her eighteenth birthday towards the end of her retreat here at the Columban mission centre. For many young Filipinas, a debut is a significant milestone - a celebration shared with family and loved ones. Yet for this young woman, the occasion carried a bittersweet reality. Her parents, working overseas, could not be physically present to celebrate with her, only joining via a video call. At the parents' request and recognising the importance of the occasion, the teacher in charge organised a simple celebration to mark the milestone. What could have been a lonely day became a memorable and joyful experience. The celebration was simple, but it reflected something profound: the power of community. In that moment, the teacher became family, affirming her worth and accompanying her during a significant moment in her life.

These stories reveal a reality that is often overlooked. The children of OFWs are not merely recipients of financial support and educational opportunities. They are young people carrying complex emotions - longing, loneliness, gratitude, confusion, resilience and hope. While remittances help provide food, education and security, they cannot fully replace a parent's presence during moments of joy, fear, uncertainty and growth.

As communities, schools, churches and organisations, we are called to accompany these children more intentionally. They need safe spaces where they can share their stories without fear of judgment.



Behind the Overseas Filipino Workers' sacrifice is a child learning to wait with hope.

They need mentors who will listen, teachers who understand their struggles and communities that will remind them that they are valued and loved. For while parents may cross oceans to provide for their families, every child deserves a community that walks beside them and reminds them that they are never alone.

I feel deeply blessed that this hope is gradually becoming a reality. Together with my fellow lay missionaries, we have begun networking with a college here in Negros Occidental to host this ministry supporting the children of OFWs. We are equally grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Presentation Sisters, whose presence and commitment to young people bring encouragement and hope as we seek to create a nurturing community for children whose lives have been shaped by migration.

It is our hope that this emerging ministry will become a space where young people can find encouragement, healing and hope. More importantly, we hope to help them discover that while migration may separate families geographically, they are never alone.

LILIBETH SABADO

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

THE CROSSES WE CARRY



Young people gather for a special Stations of the Cross, praying for those who carry the many crosses of life in Myanmar.

Myanmar, formerly Burma, was hopeful when it held its very first democratic elections after a long time. But the hope was fleeting.

Soon after the pandemic, the military declared a coup on the alleged basis that there had been massive cheating after the last elections in 2021. But the people had already gained access to greater education and freedom through the internet. They were able to encounter the world outside of Myanmar. Now, years after the coup, many areas of Myanmar are under the control of different ethnic-armed organisations. Myitkyina in the northernmost part of the country remains in a fragile situation. The Kachin Independent Army, assisted by the many young people who have joined the People's Defence Force (PDF), continues to fight. There have been weeks of shelling in areas

around the city. In many townships, the fighting has led to a large number of casualties even among civilians.

On the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, every September 14, a huge crowd used to gather at the foot of Holy Cross Mountain and climb it as a pilgrimage. Last year, with the roads to the mountains now controlled by the Burmese army, the Myitkyina Diocese decided to keep the celebrations simple in every parish. Many fear being checked and arrested.

When I recently travelled to Yangon to take a few days off and get some resources for the student centre in Myitkyina, I met many alumni of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina. It was great to see them again after such a long time. This group of students was among the first that joined the movement. I asked one of them, "When are you returning to Myitkyina?" He replied, "Never." That would be the common answer

Over the last two years, we have formed and prepared 54 students through our Positive Youth Development Certificate Program.

for many young people who are now displaced by the ongoing war and conflict in every part of Myanmar.

These young people have only one dream: to leave the country. As a result, we are losing badly needed human resources such as teachers and mentors. Even in church, I overheard one catechist ask an elderly person to learn to play the keyboard because, he explained, whenever he trained a young person to play or when a young person could already play, they always left after a few months to go abroad for work.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, we decided to celebrate with a special Stations of the Cross for the youth. About forty young people joined the activity. In place of the 14 stations, we highlighted different struggles and challenges young people in Myanmar continue to face today, representing the 14 crosses they face:

- War and conflict in Kachin land
- Violence against women and children
- Young persons in prison
- Child labour
- Climate change and pollution
- Internal displacement
- Poverty
- Mental illness
- Human trafficking
- Inadequate access to education
- Unemployment
- Broken families
- Drug addiction and HIV/AIDS
- Teenage pregnancy and abortion

At every station, we read a reflection and paused for a few minutes to pray for young people struggling with that particular cross. We then prayed together for the intentions of these young people.

At the last station, a huge cross was placed in front of the grotto to remind the young people that they were not alone. The cross reminded them that there is hope in their suffering and struggles.

Life in Myitkyina is not getting easier. Prices of basic commodities have increased. Phone connection is poor, and internet access has been restricted. Now you need to go to “internet shops” to access the internet.

Returning from Yangon to Myitkyina, I was stopped by the immigration at the airport when they saw the small amount of cash I was carrying. For a few seconds I panicked before getting hold of myself. It was a good thing I still remembered my Burmese as in Myitkyina I mostly speak Jingpo - the Kachin local language.

I spoke to them to explain what I was doing in Myitkyina: “Krian Ponjee, I am a Christian monk. I work for the Church. I teach English to young people.” That is mostly how I explain myself to people here. I have to be careful with the words I use to avoid suspicion. The female officer smiled after hearing me speak in Burmese. I was relieved after she told me to go.

Living in Myanmar for the last six years has taught me to live one day at a time. It is very difficult to make plans, as situations can change in an instant. But it has also taught me to be grateful even more for the little things. It has taught me to be more compassionate and generous. It has taught me, above all, to be hopeful.

I kindly seek the help of our readers to bring some relief and hope to many distressed young people through your support for our Student Learning Resources Centre (SLRC) and the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) movement. We provide leadership, livelihood, and employability-skills training to build the resilience and confidence of young people to face these daily struggles.

Over the last two years, we have formed and prepared 54 students through our Positive Youth Development Certificate Program. Currently, 24 new students are participating in Batch 4. They will undergo nine months of training in English, Computing, Accounting, Life-Work Skills, Personal Development, and Entrepreneurship. We also provide additional training in English, Computer Science, Teaching Skills, Leadership Skills, and Mental Health Awareness and Interventions to hundreds more.

Thank you for your support and prayers.

FR KURT ZION PALA

Columban Fr Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.



Jao Resari (third from right) visiting the Reforestation Project, Bantolinao Farm, with John Din (third from left), fellow Columban missionaries and local farmers.

Many years ago, I encountered a tree so striking that I had to stop and stand beside it for a long time, simply taking it in. It stood tall and strong atop a massive rock, its roots winding through cracks and crevices in the hard rock, finding their way forward, while its branches reached towards the sky despite the tree's harsh and unlikely foundation.

I found myself in awe, drawn into quiet contemplation by its presence. For me, the tree became an image of quiet resilience in the face of obstacles. What stayed with me most was its silent lesson in facing challenges the same way, continuing to move forward even when circumstances seem overwhelming or impossible.

I carry this memory as an invitation not only to recognise the wounds of our world and see ecological crisis, social inequality and deep spiritual hunger as daunting challenges, but also to receive them as profound opportunities to witness God's presence calling us to respond to the needs of our time. Just as the tree found its way through rock, we too are called to hold fast to faith and to notice the quiet possibilities for renewal within creation, within communities and within God's call for each one of us.

Integrating ecological awareness into my daily life and ministry remains a challenge. Yet it also opens an

opportunity to live and witness to an integral mission that holds together faith, justice and care for creation. I feel invited to be more intentional about my lifestyle choices and more attentive in prayer to God's presence within all of creation.

More and more, I feel called to grow in ecological conversion, an ongoing journey that invites deeper awareness and more consistent choices as I integrate care for creation into my life. My sense of gratitude and reverence has deepened, helping me become more mindful of my actions and decisions. Looking ahead, I am drawn to engage more in community initiatives that will help me grow as a responsible steward of God's creation, walking alongside those who have experience and wisdom in ecological advocacy.

The following prayer was shared during the Online *Laudato Si'* Animators Program, which I participated in last November.

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

We ask for open minds, open hearts and an open will, so that we can be alert and able to identify solutions to complex problems on Earth, in our Church and within communities around the world.

We ask for your wisdom and perseverance to develop Gospel based responses to the urgent ecological, social and cultural crises we face. Allow us to draw others closer to Jesus Christ, our Saviour and brother.

Amen.



I found myself in awe, drawn into quiet contemplation by its presence. For me, the tree became an image of quiet resilience in the face of obstacles

JAO RESARI

Columban lay missionary Jao Resari lives and works in Taiwan.

A PLACE WHERE HOPE GROWS

When hope disappears, life becomes a daily struggle for survival.

Poverty, unemployment, violence, and uncertainty can leave people believing that nothing will ever change. Yet, in some of the poorest communities of Peru, hope is being quietly rebuilt - not through handouts alone, but by helping people discover their dignity, strength, and potential.

This is the mission of Warmi Huasi, a Columban-supported community centre serving San Benito and Carabayllo on the outskirts of Lima. It is a welcoming place where people are respected, listened to and encouraged, regardless of their circumstances.

The Church calls us to be the "Good Samaritan", walking alongside those who suffer. Warmi Huasi brings this vision to life by accompanying people as they rebuild their lives and strengthen their communities. One successful initiative is the Women Leadership Empowerment Program. Through workshops on self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, healthy family relationships, violence prevention and leadership, women discover abilities they may not have recognised before.

Camila, a mother of four and a seamstress, describes how the program transformed her outlook. *"I have learned to value myself, which helps me improve my relationship with my children. My faith has motivated me because I believe in myself, and I believe that I will always achieve what I set my mind to do."* Like many mothers, Camila spent years putting everyone else's needs before her own. The program helped her recognise her worth and build confidence, benefiting both herself and her family.

Mia, who sells goods in the local market, experienced a similar transformation. After the emotional and financial pressures of the pandemic, the leadership workshops gave her renewed purpose. Today, she speaks confidently about growing her business, strengthening her family life and deepening her faith.

The impact reaches beyond individual women. Cusi works at a kindergarten and participates in the local Child Protection Committee. Her training helps her recognise and respond to violence affecting children. She encourages other women to participate because she believes stronger families create stronger

communities. *"Please continue supporting small communities so that we can improve our lives,"* she says.

Education provides another pathway to hope. Through a partnership with local education authorities, Warmi Huasi offers an Adult Education Program, enabling women to continue their education while learning practical skills such as nutrition and sustainable gardening.

Zoe lost her employment during the pandemic. After joining the Health and Environment Committee, she learned to establish an organic vegetable garden using recycled materials. The garden now provides fresh food for her family and reduces household expenses. *"I value my time more,"* she says. *"I am motivated, and I want to continue learning."* She hopes to complete secondary education and eventually sell vegetables from her garden.

Hope is also being nurtured among young people. Warmi Huasi provides after-school activities, reading clubs and community workshops where children can reconnect, develop confidence and dream about their futures. Thirteen-year-old Sofia dreams of completing high school, attending university and building a meaningful career. Twelve-year-old Luciana discovered a love of reading through the Reading Club and now hopes to study graphic design or psychology and one day help other children. These stories remind us that mission is about more than financial assistance. It is about restoring confidence, strengthening families, protecting children and creating communities where every person knows they are valued.

Every workshop, conversation, garden planted and child encouraged to dream becomes another seed of hope. Through Warmi Huasi, Columban Mission continues to walk alongside people on the margins, transforming lives, one family and one community at a time. For those who support Columban Mission, these stories are your stories too. Your prayers and generosity help people like these women and children discover renewed purpose and confidence.

Together, we can continue creating places where hope grows.

FR ED O'CONNELL

Columban Fr Ed O'Connell lived in Peru for over 40 years. He now lives and works in Britain.

FAITHFUL COMPANIONSHIP



Columban student Jinwook Kim visits an isolated village in the interior of Sindh, where Hindus and Christians live side by side in harmony with fellow Columbans, Frs Iowane Naio (seated on the left), Jerry Lohera (standing on the left side) and Columban student Zau Mai Peter (standing on the right).

My pastoral experience in Badin, together with the gradual acceptance of my own limitations, has deepened my understanding of what it truly means to be present with others.

When I arrived in Badin on 24 September 2025, I began visiting parishioners who live far from the parish house where I stay with Columban Frs Pat Visanti and Elbert Balbastro. Two insights emerged during these encounters. The first was an unexpected sense of solidarity between me, as a foreigner, a stranger and at times a vulnerable person in this country, and

Pakistani Christians. This sense of connection became especially clear through the stories of ordinary people living at the margins.

One moment that left a deep impression on me was my meeting with a farmer in Jati village, nearly three hours from Badin. He told me how he had lost his farmland after local Muslims illegally claimed ownership. Although the land was rightfully his, he was powerless to resist. His anger, frustration and sense of abandonment were unmistakable. Listening to him, I realised that while I could never fully grasp the pain of such an experience, I could recognise the helplessness and vulnerability that come with being unprotected in society.

Photo: Jinwook Kim

In reflecting on these experiences, a particular Gospel passage came to mind: "Jesus himself came near and went with them" (Luke 24:15). Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognise Christ at first, I, too, realised that God often draws close to us quietly - in our exhaustion, in our uncertainty and in the fragile places where we feel least in control.

His story reminded me of a difficult chapter in modern Korean history. In the 1970s and 80s, before the Seoul Olympic Games, the government forcibly removed poor families from their homes to clear slum areas and present an image of national progress. Similar injustices occur across the world, yet this memory came to me vividly, allowing me to connect more personally with the struggles faced by the people I met in Badin.

The second insight came from a more personal place: my year-long experience of illness in Pakistan. I found myself exposed to extreme climates, contaminated water, heavily fertilised vegetables and oily food, resulting in fever, chills, allergic reactions, gout and even dental problems. Each period of illness brought frustration, sadness and a sense of powerlessness, especially when I could not carry out my pastoral duties.

Added to this were the occasional feelings of being unsafe or unwelcome due to my East Asian appearance, a consequence of current political tensions in the region.

In reflecting on these experiences, a particular Gospel passage came to mind: *"Jesus himself came near and went with them, but they were kept from recognizing him."* (Luke 24:15-16). Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognise Christ at first, I, too, realised that God often draws close to us quietly - in our exhaustion, in our uncertainty and in the fragile places where we feel least in control. This verse helped me understand that companionship in faith is not always dramatic; it often unfolds in silence, in vulnerability and in the simple act of walking alongside others.

In this context, I had no choice but to accept the limits of my body and the reality of circumstances beyond my control. Gradually, I recognised that I shared something profound with Pakistani Christians - the experience of fragility, uncertainty and endurance.

This realisation allowed me to encounter others more deeply. After recovering from illness, I returned to parish life with renewed sensitivity. Attending Mass

with parishioners and children once again filled me with joy and hope. Their sincere presence, their simple faith and their quiet resilience taught me that evangelisation is not only about what I do, but also about who I am for others. Their presence evangelised me.

Reflecting on the heart of Jesus - his deep compassion for all people, even for his enemies - I was reminded of his tenderness towards the poor, the marginalised and the sick, shown even when he himself was weary. His ministry was, above all, a ministry of presence. My time in Badin during my two-year First Missionary Assignment in Pakistan has helped me understand this truth more deeply. To be present with others is not merely a pastoral duty - it is an act of love, solidarity and faith.

JINWOOK KIM

Columban student Jinwook Kim is on his two-year First Missionary Assignment in Pakistan.

ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY



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ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY



Calloused hands transform strands of bamboo and rattan into a work of art disguised as an ordinary basket.

MISSION AMONG CALLOUSED HANDS

In April 2025, Columban Fr Brian Gore died on the Island of Negros in the Philippines. For more than fifty years, Brian had worked with families of subsistence farmers. At his wake, I watched the calloused hands of those farmers gently reach out to touch his coffin.

Some farming families have members with hearing disabilities. Through the “Welcome Home Foundation” started by Columban Fr Joe Coyle, they have learned sign language. They prayed at Fr Brian’s coffin with their hands.

Also attending Fr Brian’s funeral were Columban Fathers and Sisters who have worked for decades in the mountains of Mindanao alongside the Subanen people. The hands of Subanen parents are calloused from cultivating root crops in hardened hillside soil.

Those same calloused hands are equally adept at threading bamboo and rattan into beautiful works of art disguised as ordinary baskets.

For 25 years, I have had the privilege of working with Subanens whom the Columban Sisters have served for more than forty years in a ministry that honours their language and culture and values their sacred bond with their ancestral land. In line with the work and vision of the Columban Sisters, I have been working with a group of Subanen crafters to create a livelihood ministry that honours their culture, supports their families, and celebrates their deep connection with their habitat.

As part of our craft ministry, we make Christmas cards whose images connect the Nativity story to the lives of Subanen families. This year’s cards feature a star shining on the hands of Mary and Joseph as they do the ordinary things that Subanen parents do to care for each other and their children. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, who came into the world to make God’s love visible. He did so by touching the lives



Columban Fr Vincent Busch with Subanen crafter.

of ordinary people in ways that helped them see themselves and others as works of art, woven and loved by God.

In the same spirit, we cut, colour, and fold ordinary paper into Christmas cards that become works of art. They spotlight the calloused hands of Joseph and Mary as they perform the everyday activities that make love visible in our lives.

For nearly a century, Columbans throughout the Philippines have served people with calloused hands and, together with them, have built communities that care for one another and their land.

The Holy Spirit continues to call and guide all followers of Jesus to nurture communities that love one another and care for all of God's creation, as Jesus loved the people he met each day and cherished the earth he walked on.

Columbans throughout the Philippines have been blessed to serve in such Spirit-filled communities that embrace one another with calloused hands.

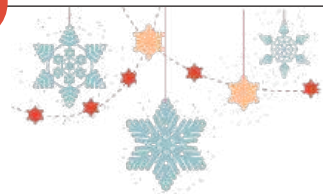
FR VINCENT BUSCH

Columban Fr Vincent Busch lives and works in the Philippines.



Subanen Christmas card.

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A SILENT PLAGUE

People in Fiji are scared. Drug addiction and an exponential increase in young people testing positive for HIV have frightened the government, churches, and communities. It has become a national emergency.

There have been massive seizures of drugs in Fiji in the last two years. Almost five tons of methamphetamine were discovered and seized near Nadi in 2024. The police captured F\$1 billion worth of cocaine being smuggled ashore on the northern coast of Viti Levu in January 2026. Fiji has become a transit hub for gangs shipping drugs to Australia and New Zealand because of its extensive and poorly policed coastline.

A growing portion of these shipments are being sold to young people in Fiji. Drug use is becoming visible in the schools. Children as young as 10 years old have been caught trafficking meth alongside marijuana and becoming users. A whole generation is in danger of being lost. There are drug gangs with connections to overseas syndicates. Some police and customs officials have also been implicated.

With increasing drug use, a surge of over 700% in three years (2023–2025) of people testing positive for HIV has occurred. This is related to the sharing of needles and blue-toothing among addicts. “Blue-toothing”, also known as “flashbleeding” or “hot spotting”, is a dangerous technique where an addict withdraws blood from his own body in a syringe after taking meth and then injects this blood into another person’s body.

While sexual intercourse is still the main way of spreading HIV, needle sharing and blue-toothing are the causes of the recent massive increase in HIV infection in Fiji. To put the situation in context, there are 3,500 known cases of HIV in New Zealand but 9,000 known cases in Fiji, which has only about one-sixth of New Zealand’s population.

With increasing drug use, a surge of over 700% in three years (2023–2025) of people testing positive for HIV has occurred. This is related to the sharing of needles and blue-toothing among addicts.

THE RESPONSE

The Fiji military is being deployed to support police in the escalating fight against drugs. Unfortunately, a young man, said to be a drug lord, was detained by the army and was found dead recently in the camp. His death was declared by the investigating police to have been murder. The Minister of Defence acknowledged concerns about human rights and accountability and emphasised that law enforcement must remain within the bounds of the law. He added that military involvement will depend on operational needs and legal authority. “The military role will be one of support, not substitution,” he said.

The Minister for Police, the Pacific Conference of Churches and other social leaders held a two-day National Pastoral Response to the drug crisis in February 2026. The minister said that policing alone could not solve the drug problem. There needs to be a balance between the “black glove” approach (arrests and sentencing) and the “white glove” approach (community awareness and strengthening of family and community care). The majority Methodist Church announced a three-year program of prayer and fasting as well as promotion of drug awareness among its members. The three-day conference of Catholic priests in Fiji this year focused on the drug challenge and what Catholic parishes and associations could do to remedy it.

TREATING DRUG ADDICTS

There are no public drug treatment centres in Fiji yet. One has been built in Suva but has not yet opened,



Fijian communities living amongst drug use, HIV and poverty.

and another is planned for the western side of the main island. As a result, many young addicts are being held in St Giles Mental Hospital in Suva. There are also medical services for HIV-infected prisoners within the Fiji Corrections Services. But the medical officers there are worried because some of the infected prisoners refuse to take the medicines they supply. Some prisoners say that the treatment is a conspiracy to harm them, and others say that they can be cured by faith in God alone.

I taught pastoral counselling and counselling supervision this year in a program run by Pasifika Communities University. I noticed that about one-third of the participants in the counselling program were corrections officers. The Fiji Corrections Services' management and medical officers are hoping that these officers, with training in pastoral counselling, will be able to persuade the prisoners to take the HIV medicine.

The course supervisors working with the trainee counsellors noticed a big change in themselves as a result of their counselling experience. They said they found themselves listening to and understanding the traumas behind the offending. They recognised their common humanity, and this changed their outlook and behaviour towards the prisoners. Other officers want to do the course.

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Fr Eamon Sheridan is a Columban who has been running a drug rehabilitation centre in Myanmar for many years. We hope that he will be able to come later this year and share his experience of drug rehabilitation with people who are trying to respond to this challenge in Fiji. We are at a tipping point and need all the help and advice we can get to counteract this silent plague.

FR FRANK HOARE

Columban Fr Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.

MISSION WORLD

EVANGELICAL DISCERNMENT IN ANALYSING CONTEXTS OF MISSION

Quite a while back, I spoke about contextual approaches to mission. I stressed the importance of being open to what I can learn about the context within which I live out the call to mission, and I learn fundamentally through listening to the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed.

Now, after doing a course at the INODEP institute in Paris back in 1981, I spent a considerable part of my missionary life conducting social analysis seminars and workshops. It brought me into close contact with the painful realities of poverty and oppression.

As I work through Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, I cannot help but take particular interest in his study of the contexts of mission. This he does in chapter two, which is entitled "Amid the crisis of communal commitment". There he begins by saying that, rather than applying a "purely sociological analysis", he "proposed something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment". (n. 50)

Moreover, he says that it is not his job as Pope to offer a thorough study of "contemporary reality". Still, he calls upon all of us to engage in an "ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times". Here he is citing that often-quoted text from Pope Paul VI (*Ecclesiam Suam* August 6, 1964). But what Francis wants to do is focus on "certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the church". (n. 51)

Now here I sense a person who has gone down into the slums of his own country, Argentina, and come into

personal contact with the poor. This is evident when he writes that when we consider the commandment "Thou shalt not kill", this applies very much "to an economy of exclusion and inequality." He goes on to write "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless." (n. 53)

In this context, he goes on to challenge the claims of "trickle-down theories" because he notes the consequences of such theories, "Almost being unaware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own"! (n. 54)

Evangelical discernment doesn't take away the need for social analysis. What it basically does is say we are not just simply analysing the extent of poverty, looking at figures that come out of government records or academic research. What we need to do is talk about what we see day-to-day when we live among the poor. The pain we feel or share when we see people struggling to make ends meet will prompt us to do the analysis and come to a deeper knowledge of the present "signs of the times".

FR TOM ROUSE

Regional Councillor of Oceania

MISSION INTENTIONS

POPE LEO XIV

September - For the care of water: Let us pray for a just and sustainable management of water, a vital resource, so that everyone may have equal access to it.

October - For mental health ministry: Let us pray that the mental health ministry be established throughout the Church, helping to overcome the stigma and discrimination of persons with mental illnesses.

COLUMBAN ACTIVITIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

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

ACROSS

2. The figure shown inspiring St Matthew.
6. Saint of Assisi who inspired St Clare.
8. Italian town associated with St Francis and St Clare.
10. A virtue strongly associated with St Francis.
12. Jesus said to Matthew, "..... me." (one word)

DOWN

1. Founder of the religious order later known as the Poor Clares.
3. The account of the life and teachings of Jesus.
4. An important part of Francis and Clare's spiritual life.
5. He was warned in a dream to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt.
7. A title given to St Matthew as one of the Twelve.
9. One of the Twelve Apostles and a Gospel writer.
11. A way of life embraced by Francis and Clare.

ANSWERS:
ACROSS: 2. Angel, 6. Francis, 8. Assisi, 10. humility, 12. follow
DOWN: 1. Clare, 3. Gospel, 4. prayer, 5. Joseph, 7. Apostle, 9. Matthew, 11. poverty



SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER



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'Do what you can' Bishop Edward J Galvin



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