

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

March/April 2021



Suffering and Joy

C O N T E N T S

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The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.



In So Many Words

By Fr. John Keenan

Living in Sub-Human Conditions

The village of Parola, Tondo, Philippines, is a shantytown where the Pasig River and Manila Bay waters meet. It has been five years since a huge fire completely gutted it. No one is sure as to how the fire started but since the houses are closely packed, they were all destroyed, along with the community chapel and everything inside it. Fortunately, 20,000 people escaped but with little more than the clothes on their backs. Though many of them were small children or elderly and infirm, no life was lost.

The Government made no effort to reconstruct the area and make the area more fire proof and accessible to fire engines. Therefore, the people themselves began rebuilding their shacks little by little. Unemployment is high and wages are low, yet they gradually improved their humble dwellings. The houses were now restored, some of them up to four floors high. They consist of small one-family rooms, linked by very narrow stairways. Because of overcrowding, the living conditions are barely human. There are no facilities for recreation.

Living in this kind of environment naturally gives rise to regular mortalities. Wakes are then frequently held along the narrow pathways since the houses are so small. Often, the grieved family cannot afford the funeral expenses, so the neighbors play cards and the winners share the money with the bereaved family. They keep playing cards until enough money is raised and that is why some wakes go for a few days or longer.

The chapel of St. Ezekiel Moreno has now been restored and serves as the location for inspiring liturgies and other community activities such as feeding programs and meetings. Every Sunday I go to Parola with four of our seminarians to celebrate Mass in the Chapel and take communion to the sick and housebound. After visiting the families, the seminarians meet with the youth and try to organize them into a cohesive youth club. These children are very talented but need facilitation and guidance.

The call of Pope Francis to go to the peripheries of society and be with the poor is in our minds and hearts on these occasions. The seminarians gain so much from their exposure to such poverty and deprivation, and they are inspired by the people's faith in God and their hope in the face of all the difficulties of their lives.

Every Sunday I go to Parola with four of our seminarians to celebrate Mass in the Chapel and take communion to the sick and housebound.

Columban Fr. John Keenan lives and works in the Philippines.



Time In Mission Flies... ...But It Also Flows Like a River!

By Gertudes C. Samson

We always hear the expression “Time flies!” and indeed that is true. In 2020, I suddenly realized that I was already celebrating my 10th anniversary as Columban Lay Missionary. Truly, it is amazing how by God’s grace I made it this long, which I myself did not expect. Looking back at my 10 years of experience as a Columban lay missionary, time in mission does not only fly but also flows like a river too.

When I began my first three-year commitment to lay mission in 2010, I was thinking three years is very long, so each day seems so long too, perhaps like the flow of river in winter because the water is still frozen you could see only very little. I experienced the terrible winter of Britain that year too;

the news said it was the hardest winter in the UK in the past 50 years. Snow could still enter even my high knee boots. I had a terrible cough, because I was not aware yet how to protect myself from the cold. In spite of that, it is amazing how God continually asked me to stay and even asked me to renew.

I said, okay, God, if you ask, I will renew for another three years. That second term flows smoothly, perhaps like the river during the spring. The water just flows smoothly, too—maybe because I am already familiar with a lot of things in mission and there are less struggles, unlike the first term. During my first term, I needed to adjust and adapt to many things: language, culture, food, environment and most of all the cold weather of Britain. Indeed,

being in cross-cultural mission is like being born again—like a baby!

Then towards the end of my second term, God made me realized He was calling me again to continue. At that time, honestly, I started to complain. I said, God, this helps that you are asking me, but it seems endless and would take a lifetime—and I have my own plans for my life, too! I think I tried to wrestle, but in the end, I still said, okay, God, I will renew for three years only—but not six years!

Perhaps, like the flow of the river during autumn struggles due to falling twigs and leaves, I struggled too. I needed to let go of certain plans and embrace the invitation to be part of God’s eternal plan.

God is good, and during my third term He made me realize that indeed He wanted me to be part of His eternal plan, and that is because I am His daughter, and part of the heirs of His Kingdom. So, I have to continually take part in taking care of the business of my Father's Kingdom (which is also my own Kingdom too) as his child. He is right—who else will help the Father but His children!

And that business is to spread love into the world wherever I go, in every opportunity or situation that is presented to me, to demonstrate the love and teachings of my brother Jesus Christ, because God is love!

Realizing that, I learned to set aside my own plans and trust God. As a result, I began to enjoy more my mission and catch the little pockets of joys that every situation brings. Mission is now my way of life, and Britain is now also my home.

Perhaps now, like in the summer when the water on the river flows more smoothly, I can see things more clearly now too and am able to remove obstacles that block the flow of graces

and blessings. Since the surroundings are brighter, like in summer, I could better see the wonderful details of flowers and tiny little creatures like butterflies and ladybugs around, the little pockets of joys and blessings that God surprisingly throws into my path when I least expect it. He is indeed the God of Surprises.

And so finally, last June 25, 2020, at the midst of coronavirus pandemic, I signed my additional six-year commitment, and this time as a long-term Columban Lay Missionary!

Since gathering in an enclosed space is still not allowed due to lockdown and social distancing rules, we could not have a party or a celebration as we had planned.

I requested instead that I simply sign my commitment not just in any open space but specifically beside the streams. Why? Because for me, I find that symbolic in line with these Bible verses that served as my inspiration that day of the renewal of my commitment, and is also the inspiration for this article:

*"...Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in Him.*

*They will be like a tree planted by the
water*


that sends out its roots by the stream.

*It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.*

*It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit."*

(Jeremiah 17:7-8 New International Version).

God, You are the river that watered me over the years and kept me growing in spite of the challenges and changes of the seasons throughout the years. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of your eternal mission of spreading love into the world!

St. Columban, thank you for the seeds of inspiration and courage that you passed on to our founders doing cross-cultural mission, the same seeds that were also passed on to me until this day. St. Columban, pray for us! And please keep me eternally in your prayers too! 

Originally from the Philippines, Columban lay missionary Gertrudes Samson lives and works in Britain.



Gertrudes signing her commitment form



Razia

Who is Razia?

Educating Women and Children in Pakistan

Fr. Joseph Joyce

Razia is a Pakistani woman of small stature and big heart. She has known the Columbans since about 1985, and from that time, has been involved in bringing education to the women and children of brick kiln workers in the villages around her home in Jiunpura, Sheikhpura, Punjab Province. This is her story in her own words.

My name is Razia Barkat. I was born on the evening of December 12, 1965, in Hafizabad Parish, Punjab, about fifty kilometers from Sheikhpura. I was the youngest of ten children—five brothers and four sisters. All of my brothers died when they reached the age of five. Nobody really knows what kind of illness caused their deaths, but my family said it was panic (*khauf*). My birth brought no celebration or joy, but disappointment and sorrow. My parents wanted a boy. Everyone was weeping bitterly, and I was left all alone on the ground. My mother refused to touch me. However, after a while, my father lifted me up and hugged me. “She will be lucky” (*qismat*), he said, and told my eldest sister, Suraya, to clothe me well. My mother refused to feed me with her milk, so I was fed on buffalo milk all through my childhood, and I used to drink lots of it—about 2 liters a day.

When I was born, my family lived in a mud house, but soon afterwards they were able to build one of brick. I saw this as a sign of the blessing of my birth. At five years old I went to school. It was thought that there was no need to send me to be educated, as I would be married off. However, my father wanted me to go to school.

There, I had a very good teacher named Miss Maya, and she found that I was very intelligent. I used to go to the Church twice a day, and also a Capuchin Brother would bring me to school. Even when I hurt my foot and could not walk, he carried me. I used to come first in the class, and I got many prizes.

When I reached fifth class, I was ready to go on to a government school, but my mother was a cleaner at a private school, and I was sent there. My father was a brick kiln worker, and he used to bring me to school on his way to work. In the evenings, he would take me on his lap and tell me stories about kings and queens, and I used to feel very peaceful. He always gave me great encouragement. He was a very good singer, and I too had this gift. I was more like him in many other ways too, even dark in color.

At the age of seventeen, a marriage was arranged for me with a man from Jiunpura, Sheikhpura. He was a brick kiln worker, an only son, illiterate, and very badly dressed. I had no desire to marry him, but his family insisted on the match, and my family hesitantly agreed.

My eldest sister Suraya, who used to look after our family while my mother was working, had gone to study nursing in Karachi. She became a staff nurse there, and my father wanted me to go and live with her. I didn't want to leave my mother, but nevertheless, my father took me to Karachi, and to the hospital where my sister worked. He wanted me to stay on in the city with her and not return to be with my future husband.

I was very happy to do so. However, one day, as I was traveling by bus to the hospital, a boy touched me. This frightened and disgusted me, and all I could do was cry. From that day I refused to go to the hospital any more.

After a short time, I returned to Hafizabad, and there my future husband's father showed me great affection, and used to bring me nice food every two weeks. Still, my mother did not want the marriage to take place, and offered him one of my sisters instead. However, he refused, and I was forced into the marriage. I still remember the date. It was November 20, 1982. I was seventeen, and he was about twenty-seven. People said the marriage would not last, and they shed many tears. I was given a buffalo and money, but still my tears flowed. My new husband's family took away my dowry and jewelry, and I had no new clothes to wear. However, my sister-in-law gave me some of her jewelry.

I immediately conceived, and, exactly nine months later, had my first child, a healthy boy, whom I called Naveed. This made me very happy, because now I had someone to love. Two years later, I had another son, Vaheed, for whom my sister Suraya gave me lots of clothes.

Around this time, a big fight broke out with my in-laws, and I left Jiunpura and went home to Hafizabad. My husband came and took back the children, who were still on mother's milk. My father sent him a message saying, “if you won't let them return to be with their mother, then you might as well kill her.” After four days, Suraya came from Karachi,



Razia and her community

and my father told her to bring the children from Jiunpura. My father-in-law told my husband to let them go or I would die, and so he gave his consent. After that, I resolved that I would never again be separated from my children. When my husband came to visit, we had another fight, and I spent the whole night in the church.

Some time later, my daughter Sumera, whom I nicknamed *Chanda* (Moon), was born. She went to school in Hafizabad and was a very strong little girl. I worked at home in dressmaking, and my other sister Perveen, who lived in Faisalabad, about a hundred kilometers away, helped me a lot.

After a long time in Hafizabad, Babu Said (a catechist) came from Sheikhpura to visit me, and informed me that there was a course in adult literacy starting there, and that I should go for training. My husband gave his consent, and I returned to Jiunpura. That was how I began my career as a teacher.

Columban Fr. Tommy O'Hanlon (Fr. Tanveer) started me off with about twenty children between the ages of six and seven, and I was supervised by Master Lazar, a schoolteacher in the Sheikhpura area. With him and the

support of Fr. Tanveer, I also opened five literacy centers, and was paid a monthly salary. I was very happy with this new development in my life.

It was about this time that I met Columban Fr. Joe Joyce. One day he came to visit, and, because it was raining heavily, he told me that it would be better not to go out to check the schools. I was touched by his care for me.

Some weeks later, another big rainstorm came, and there was flooding. Then, I got news that my son Vaheed, who was in Faisalabad, had died of dysentery. He was a very intelligent and loving child, and I nearly went insane with grief. I stopped eating, and wept continuously. Fr. Tanveer was very consoling, and I improved little by little, though I still continued to cry a lot at night.

When I got back my strength, I opened a nursery school in a brick kiln which was about two miles away from Jiunpura. I used to walk there every day until a man warned me of the danger I could be in because of being a young woman.

Then, another tragedy took place. My ten-year-old daughter Sumera got killed in a road accident. Once again, I was back in the depths of grief. After four months in this state,

I had a dream in which my dead son Vaheed was calling me to be with him. I became very weak, and people were asking why, being such a good person, I had to suffer so much.

Little by little, I recovered. Fr. Tanveer and Columban Fr. Dan O'Connor gave me great support. One day Fr. Tanveer called me to the parish house, and when I entered his office, he closed the door, sat down, and asked me why I was not having any more children. I cried, and told him that I had had an operation. He prayed with me, and then arranged for me to go to a doctor in Faisalabad to see about having the operation reversed. However, the sister was no longer at the hospital, and I did not go again after that.

At this time a women's group was being formed in the parish, and a Filipino Columban lay missionary, Miss Gloria Canama, invited me to attend a course with her in Multan. I took my youngest child, Jamshaed, with me because he was still being breast-fed. However, soon I had to send him back home because it was not possible to look after him and study as well.

Our women's team was very good. We could share our sufferings and problems. In our monthly meetings, we used to choose a text from the



Bible, usually about women, and try to apply it to our daily lives.

For three years—1989 to 1992— we worked in all of Sheikhpura. We had great affection for one another, and learned well together. One year, at Christmas time, we had a big celebration in Jiunpura on December 12. It was very cold, but 300 women attended. Gloria gave us great praise.

I used to go to the surrounding villages alone. On one occasion, I took a tonga, and the driver asked me what I was doing, and I said, “Teaching the women.” He replied angrily, “You are damaging our women.” I wasn’t afraid. I fought my corner with him and didn’t let his comment hinder my work.

Gloria gradually handed over more responsibility to me. She used to stay in our house, and taught me how to reflect more deeply on the Bible. We would go together to work with the women, and she was a great support to me.

In 1999 the Columbans left the parish of Sheikhpura. This was a big blow for me, and I faced many troubles. I began to focus more on the people of my own neighborhood in Jiunpura where so many children were still in need of schooling.

After about a year, one day a man named Rodney came to visit our

house. He belonged to a group called The Pak-Swedish Foundation, and after we chatted for a while, he said, “You are very intelligent. Would you be willing to teach our brick kiln children?” I accepted, and he sent me to Lahore for eight days of training. I did well in the course, and in 2000 I opened a small school for 30 children and women in a nearby village named Kudlathi. I had to travel to work, and there were lots of obstacles to be overcome, but I persevered.


One day a shopkeeper got fresh with me, and I told him that I was a married woman, and he should not speak to me. He said, “Okay, it doesn’t matter,” and after that he didn’t bother me again. As time passed, the older men treated me and my family well, and I felt safe going about my work.

Each year there was an evaluation meeting of the Pak-Swedish schools in Lahore, and my school always came first. I got several awards from the Foundation, and I always remembered the Columbans with great gratitude, especially Miss Gloria, Fr. Tanveer, Fr. Joe, and Fr. Dan.

On one special occasion, it was announced that there would be an inter-school competition, and a special prize would be given to the winning

school. Ten schools participated, and mine came first with the highest marks, and I was awarded some cash.

I always worked hard and well, and I knew that God was with me. I was given 130 children to teach, and I found it to be very fruitful. One year, when the fifth class students were to take government exams, I prepared them myself, and, after sitting for 10 papers each day during three days, they all passed. That was a great boost for me.

The Pak-Swedish schools closed in 2010. After that, I continued to teach for a while. However, the expenses became too much for me. Then, in 2013, I talked with Fr. Joe Joyce and explained the situation to him. He agreed to give me financial support, and I was able to supply uniforms, books, bags, and even some simple furniture, like desks. Soon, I was even able to employ some extra teachers, and now, with the ongoing support of the Columbans, I have been able to provide basic education for hundreds of children. I remain most grateful to the Columbans for all they have done for me, and through me, for my own people. May God bless them all. 

Columban Fr. Joseph Joyce lives and works in Pakistan; Razia continues to teach.



Finding God

During Our Times of Confinement

By Fr. Paul Glynn

Like many other Columban missionaries before me, I have devoted many years to trying to promote harmonious relations between Christians and Muslims in the Southern Philippines, a place that has witnessed much misunderstanding and conflict between adherents of these two world religions. Our aim has always been to become a reconciling presence—a bridge—between the Muslim and the Christian communities. Since Christians and Muslims speak different Filipino languages it is necessary to be able to speak both in order to bridge these two communities. So, in 1997, having spent two years learning and practicing Binisaya, the local language of the Christians, I set to work learning Meranao, the language spoken by Muslims in the area. By this time, I had fallen in love with the stunning tropical beauty of

I would continue my evening walks in the beautiful tropical countryside, listening to the call to prayer from the countless minarets, as I watched the sunset over the Southern sea.

the Southern Mindanao landscape and used to enjoy trekking the vast mountain ranges that overlooked the expanse of the Celebes Sea that stretches out towards Indonesia and Malaysia.

When I moved to the Muslim majority town of Malabang to study and practice the Meranao language, I would continue my evening walks in the beautiful tropical countryside, listening to the call to prayer from the countless minarets, as I watched the

sunset over the Southern sea. This is when I would feel particularly close to the goodness and greatness of the One we Christians call God, and Muslims call Allah.

All this came to a sudden halt, however, when one day I heard someone shouting at me from behind my back, as I took my evening walk after a day of language study. It was Bebe, one of the stalwarts of the Catholic parish community on the back of a motorbike being driven by her son. “What do you think you are doing Father? Come home at once!” she shouted. “Why?” I said. “I’m having my evening walk. What is wrong with that?” “Have you not heard that the kidnap-for-ransom gangs are at it again?” she warned. “They are starting to kidnap local businessmen. You are a foreigner. You will be next. Get back home and stop your nonsense!” “But what about my



A view of the banyon trees in the garden of the compound.

daily walk, Bebe? I need the exercise and I need it for my sanity after a day of studying language,” I pleaded. To which she retorted: “There’ll be no need for language or for your sanity for that matter, if you are killed.” “But I need my exercise,” I pleaded again. “You can do your exercise in the school yard,” she insisted. The yard of the parish school was about the size of three basketball courts and was surrounded by a high wire fence for security purposes. That was to be the extent of my world for the next four months, or so, as Bebe was determined that I wasn’t going to be kidnapped, despite all my protestations. “You priests preach to us about sacrifice; now is your time to put it into practice,” she would remind me, and I had no answer that could match that!

Peering through the wire fence as I briskly walked in circles around the small concrete yard each evening for my exercise, I used to feel as if I was in prison—even solitary confinement—as, with all the school children gone home, I would be pacing that small concrete world on my own. I remember that in order to avoid the notion that I was in a prison, I would focus on the lone star apple tree that I could see through the wire fence and imagine that I was walking in the countryside. Then I would stop to watch the sky turn red through the leaves of the star apple tree, as the sun set somewhere in the hidden horizon, and I would often try to imagine that I was on a mountain top overlooking the Celebes Sea. Somehow,



Fr. Paul Glynn with 3 Muslim clerics in Mindanao

at that moment, my tiny world would grow much larger.

And when I prayed, I would often be reminded of Saint John of the Cross when he was imprisoned in a pitch-black cell for a long period of time; and that what gave him strength to survive was whenever he would focus on the tiny chink of light that came into his cell each day. For him, that was the abiding presence of God in the midst of all his darkness and suffering. And Bebe was right all along: the discomfort of not being able to go for my daily walk was a

I remember that in order to avoid the notion that I was in a prison, I would focus on the lone star apple tree that I could see through the wire fence and imagine that I was walking in the countryside.

very small “sacrifice” to have to put up with compared to what John of the Cross had to face and compared to the hardship and suffering so many people in the Southern Philippines had to endure every day due to poverty and war.

As I write this, it is now 2020, and the daily increase in the number of Covid 19 cases here in Manila means that we have little choice but



Another view of the banyon trees.

to remain inside the compound of the Columban Missionaries’ Regional House. We are so lucky compared to most people here; the garden space inside our four walls is more than twenty basketball courts! Many families here have to make do with being locked down in houses one-twentieth the size of a basketball court.

After six months of this “lockdown,” we all yearn to be able to get out and about. I yearn to be able to walk again in the countryside and maybe even stroll by the sea or climb a mountain. Even though we are in the middle of the concrete jungle that is Manila, we have about a dozen trees. As I walk the circuit of our compound each evening, and as I listen to the sounds of the birds and insects that have come to stay in Manila due to the reduction in pollution that the decline in traffic from Covid19 has brought about, I look intently and lovingly at the branches and the various shades of green of the leaves on our selection of trees and at once, our little compound is transformed into a vast world of wilderness and beauty. And as I ponder the sunset through the mass of glistening leaves of our enormous banyan tree I am drawn once again to the God of Christians, the God of Muslims and the Light of the World Who never abandoned John of the Cross in his time of total isolation. **GM**

Columban Fr. Paul Glynn lives and works in the Philippines.

The Sound of Music

Using Music to Engage a Lima Neighborhood

By Fr. John Boles

“Memories Are Made of This,” go the words of the old song. Well, this certainly is the case with Father Gabriel Rojas, a Columban from Peru who for many years has brought the wonders of God and Creation into the lives of parishioners in the deprived outskirts of Lima, Peru’s capital, through the sound of the music of his folk group “*Memorias*” (“Memories” in English).

Music is in Fr. Gabriel’s blood. He was born and raised to the notes of song and guitar. From his home in

the high Andes to the teeming cities of Pakistan and now to the poverty-stricken “barrios” of Lima, music has been his constant companion. Moreover, it has served him as an indispensable pastoral tool.

His choice of title “*Memorias*” for the band is significant. His musical style is based on the enchanting melodies of his native home. “Music is part of the DNA of my family,” explains Fr. Gabriel. He is from humble peasant farming stock in the Andean province of Cajamarca (where Pizzaro

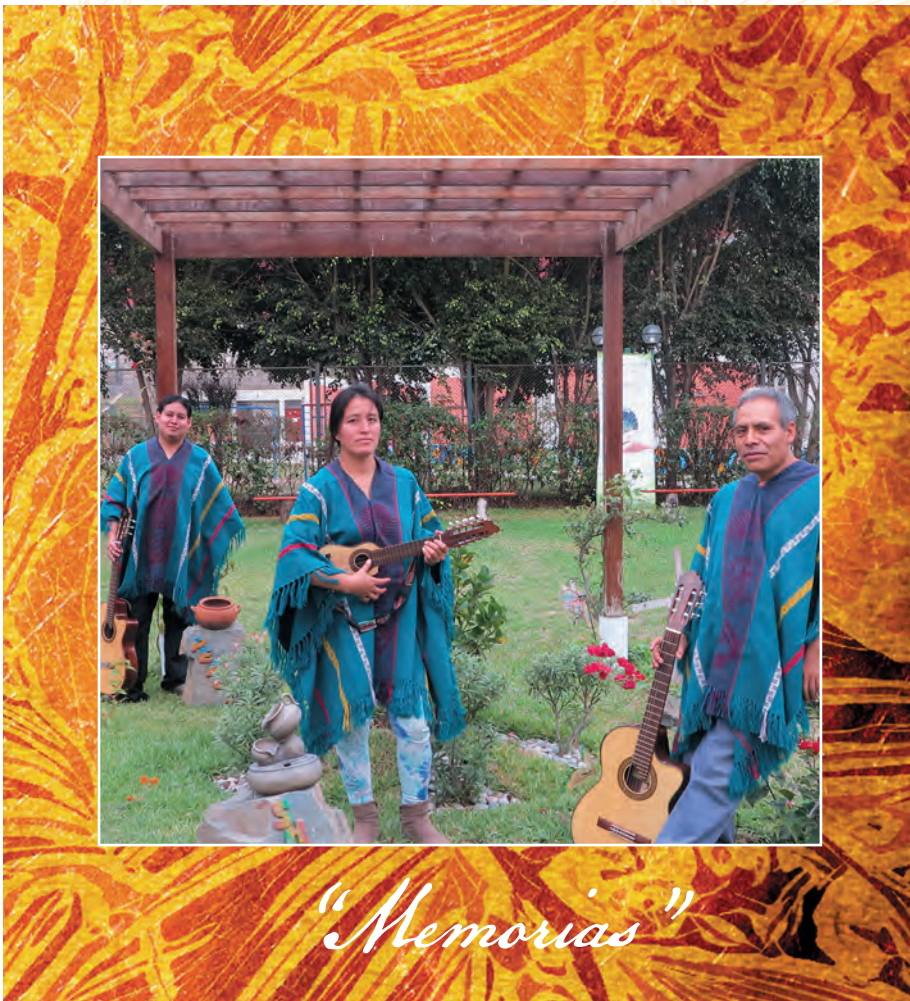
famously captured the Inca ruler Atahualpa and, in taking him, took an empire for Spain), the fifth of six children born to Serafin and Francisca.

Gabriel recalls how, from 5:30 a.m. each day, his parents labored – Serafin in the fields and Francisca at the loom. His mother is an expert weaver, transforming locally produced cotton and wool into cloaks, bags and ponchos. She continues to do so today, albeit well into her nineties.

From this happy family background came love of God, love of nature and...love of music. “As far back as I can remember there was the sound of a guitar,” remembers Fr. Gabriel fondly. His late father loved to sing. “From when he mounted his horse to leave, until his return in the evening, you could hear him singing. He could be heard for miles. He was the best singer of my village. His voice could make the mountains tremble.”

Serafin was also a catechist in the village chapel, where he led the choir. Fr. Gabriel imitated him in everything. “At 13 I made my first flute out of bamboo,” something he’d seen his Dad do. He began to play the guitar. “There were no formal music lessons. You just learnt by watching.” At 18, he was composing. When he entered seminary, the Columbans encouraged him, seeing his musical talent as a valuable means of evangelization.

By the time he was ordained a priest he had formed “*Memorias*.” Apart from guitars, the favored instruments were the traditional Andean ones of “*charango*,” “*zamponia*” and “*quena*” – kinds of banjo, harp and flute respectively. According to Fr.






Gabriel, the notes they blend, “evoke the relationship of the mountain-dweller with the trees, the animals, water, sun and wind,” all the glories of God’s Creation.

As part of his missionary service, Fr. Gabriel was appointed to Pakistan, where he spent seven years. This could have put an end to his music career but just the opposite happened. In between ministering to the tiny groups of Catholics in this overwhelmingly Islamic country, he took the opportunity to enrich his repertoire by immersing himself in Eastern music. He began practicing with unfamiliar instruments, such as the sitar. In so doing, “I was filled with emotion. It confirmed for me that music comes directly from God.”

Returning to Peru, he re-formed “Memorias” and now mixed traditional Andean sounds with Eastern ones, something that gives the group its unique style. The band was soon much in demand. Cassettes and audios were produced. The word spread.

Appointed to an underprivileged area on the edge of Metropolitan Lima, Gabriel and his “Memorias” became a familiar aspect of the local Church scene, touching people – and especially the young – in ways that more conventional pastoral methods could not.

“This is what music means to me as a missionary,” affirms Fr. Gabriel. “It is a form of pastoral work with opportunities and demands that go further than mere sacramental preparation. It is a space where people can grow and develop and find themselves during their journey through life. It is a school of values.”

It also gives a great deal of pleasure to people. The sort of pleasure we’ll be so much in need of in our post-coronavirus world. The pleasure that comes from the “sound of music.” 

Columban Father Gabriel Rojas ministers in the parish of “Los Santos Arcangeles” (“The Holy Arcangels”) in the Diocese of North Lima. Columban Father John Boles comes from England and has worked in South America for the last 25 years.

Mission in Mushroom City

Keeping Pace with One of the World's Fastest Growing Cities: Lima, Peru

By Fr. John Boles

“Ever seen a mushroom grow?” asked our gardener one morning in the grounds of the Columban Center House in Peru, as he pointed out to some of us a particularly fine example. “Sprouts up overnight. Incredible.” “Hmmm, just like Lima,” observed Fr. Dermot Carthy. He should know. During his sixty years in Peru he has seen its capital city explode in size, a perfect example of what are generally known as “mushroom cities.”

“Mushroom city” was a term coined in the latter part of the last century to describe those towns in Africa, Asia and Latin America which in the post-war period experienced spectacular rates of expansion, rapidly becoming mega-conurbations. Classic examples are those of Tokyo, Mumbai, Lagos, and Mexico City. But for speed of growth, few can match that of Lima – and the mission of the Columban Fathers has had to “mushroom” apace.

The figures are staggering. When Fr. Dermot arrived from Ireland in 1960, Lima had a population of just over one million. In 2020 it was nearly ELEVEN million, a tenfold increase in just sixty years.

The Columbans had first come to Peru a few years before Fr. Dermot's arrival, in 1952. The bishops of Peru had asked us to set up a parish on what was then the northern edge of the town of Lima. There was one large neighborhood of about 40,000 people, built in the 1940's. However, the area was mainly rural, made up of some 15 estate farms (“haciendas”), which grew maize and cotton on irrigated desert land and employed a lot of seasonal

labor drawn from the nearby Andes mountains.

A special remit was granted by Rome to name the parish after Martín de Porres. Permission was needed because he wasn't a saint yet! He wouldn't be canonized until 1962. Martín was chosen because he'd been from Lima. Also, the three Columban priests who took over the parish were from Ireland, where Blessed Martín already enjoyed a strong devotional following – stronger, possibly, than in his native Peru.

So, just pause a moment. We are in 1952 with one parish, three priests, no church and 40,000 people (maybe up to 60,000 at harvest time).

Fast-forward to 2020. That “parish” is now the best part of an entire diocese, the Diocese of North Lima, one of the most populous in the world, with 47 parishes, over 100 priests, in excess of 200 churches and chapels...and a population of NEARLY THREE MILLION!

“If you think that is amazing,” observes Fr. Dermot, “remember that of those 47 parishes, over half of them were founded by the Columbans!” He knows all of them, and has worked in six, in some more than once.

“Thrown in at the deep end,” perhaps best describes how he started. Born in Dublin, Fr. Dermot joined the Columbans at 17, was ordained at 23 and shipped off to South America almost immediately. Picked up at Lima airport, he was told that, if it was alright with him, he was “on” for rosary and benediction that same night.

“There was no formal language training given beforehand in those days,” he explains. “As everything was done in Latin back then, it was felt you didn't need the local language in order to get started. You could do Masses and Baptisms and the rest, straight off. As for talking to the people, it was reckoned you'd pick that up as you went along.”

Fortunately, he HAD taken some Spanish classes in Ireland, and had, “spent a summer hitch-hiking around Spain,” so he wasn't entirely clueless on the language front.

Experience swiftly followed experience for Fr. Dermot. The mushroom city miracle was underway, and the Columbans would fail to adapt at their cost. This was the epoch of the land invasions, when huge chunks of desert or farmland would be occupied (often, literally, overnight) by hundreds of flimsy wicker-work cabins. The squatters would then look to slowly improve their dwellings as time went on, and wait until local authorities belatedly legalized the occupations and installed public utilities.

And so it was that just two years after his ordination and arrival, Fr. Dermot found himself pastor of a brand new, densely packed and desperately poor parish. “The Virgin Mediatrix of Villa María,” was the posh name for a recently occupied former quarry and rubbish dump, “populated by 10,000 people and 4,000 pigs.” A simple mud-brick building served as parish house, chapel and clinic. The latter was staffed by



Fr. Dermot, circa 1960



Fr. Dermot, 2021



A woman working in Fr. Dermot's first parish



Parish life

Anglican volunteers, a rare example of ecumenism well before the practice generally caught on.

There was no electricity or water supply. Sewage disposal was via an open drain and an equally foul river. Fr. Dermot fondly remembers a certain daily ritual. "Each morning, the children were sent out with the household potties. They were supposed to empty the night soil into the river. Mind, a lot of them couldn't be bothered, and just tipped the stuff out a block or two from home. Consequently, the parish was

always pervaded by, "a special kind of perfume."

Fr. Dermot's was the only house in the parish with a generator. This, in turn, powered the sole television set in the parish. "We became the local cinema. All the neighborhood kids appeared each night outside our window, dragging bricks they used as seats. Sat there happy as anything. Couldn't hear the sound, but just gawped at the screen. Then cleared off when the generator shut down bang on ten."

It wasn't long before Fr. Dermot was called on to serve an even bigger parish, as the invasions spread out across a nearby plain set between two hill ranges. Then, as all available flat land was used up, the occupations spread up the hills. Columban parishes followed them and soon, inevitably, so did Fr. Dermot.

It wasn't until 1989 that his wandering finally ended, when he took on a "relatively small" parish (half on the plain, half on the mountain side) of "just" nine churches and chapels.

And there he remains today, still priest in charge, at the tender age of 85. Living evidence of Columban mission in Mushroom City. **CM**

Father Dermot Carthy is an Irish Columban who has worked in Peru since 1960. Father John Boles is an English Columban who has been in Peru since 1994.

Paschal Candle

Hope and Promise

By Fr. Timothy Mulroy

This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.

During the celebration of the Easter Vigil last year, this verse from the *Exsultet* resonated deeply within me. As the Paschal Candle, signifying the risen Christ, was raised high, I imagined the radiance of His glory dissolving the steel bars encircling the prison of death. Thanks to Christ's profound love for us prisoners, held captive by our own selfishness and shame, we have been set free in order to begin a new life filled with hope and promise.

As I continued gazing on the Paschal Candle, I also became aware that this particular candle had its own unique story to tell about prison and freedom, about hope and promise.

Haiti Muller is from the island kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific. In 2015, she became a Columban lay missionary and was assigned to the Philippines. After learning the Cebuano language, she joined the ministry team that visits the men's prison in the city of Cagayan de Oro. In addition, to attending to the spiritual needs of the inmates in that overcrowded facility, the ministry team also offers pastoral support to their families.

The prisoners shared with Haiti their feelings of loneliness, frustration and depression. They also shared about how much they miss their families, as well as their longing to make a new start in life. As their release day approached, they became so excited, delighted—and scared! While they cherished great hopes, they also realized that there were many obstacles on the path ahead: a lingering sense of shame, distrust by others, and a lack of job skills.



Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy with Haiti Muller (in the gray shirt)

Hearing such stories over and over again, and seeing how some former prisoners had fallen quickly back into their old way of life and were soon returned to prison, Haiti realized that something needed to be done to help them make a new start. Since one of her Columban lay missionary colleagues had a candle-making livelihood project for poor women in the capital city of Manila, Haiti decided to go there and learn about it.

Some weeks later, having received not only an understanding of the candle-making process, but also encouragement and support, Haiti returned to her prison ministry in Cagayan de Oro. There, with a shoestring budget and the use of a vacant room at the archdiocesan center, she started a similar candle-making project with a small group of former prisoners.

A year ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Philippines, seeing this livelihood project, and meeting Haiti and her co-workers. In my conversations with them, I learned how this livelihood project functions as an important bridge between prison life and the outside world. It provides the workers with a weekly wage that prevents them from falling into poverty and desperation, thereby giving them much-needed stability as they continue to re-integrate into society. The livelihood project also helps them to forge new and different kinds of relationships, which in turn

strengthens their self-worth and facilitates networking that slowly opens up new horizons for them.

When the time came for me to say goodbye, Haiti and her co-workers asked if I had any empty space in my suitcase, and then presented me with a Paschal Candle to take with me back to Hong Kong. Since the season of Lent had just begun, I could not have imagined a more practical and meaningful gift.

A few weeks later, as my Columban companions and I gathered in our small chapel to celebrate the Easter Vigil, we found a new depth of meaning in the lyrics of the *Easter Exsultet* by the light of that Paschal Candle.

This is the night, when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld. Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night. Receive it as a pleasing fragrance, and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

As I listened, I rejoiced in solidarity with Haiti and her co-workers in Cagayan de Oro because of our shared belief that the risen Christ, whom the Paschal Candle signified, had freed all of us Christians from the prison of sin and death, and given us a new start filled with hope and promise. **EM**

Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy serves on the Society's general council in Hong Kong.



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*They only asked us to remember the poor — the very thing
I also was eager to do. Galatians 2:10*

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Your gifts helped Columban Fr. Michael Hoban run a summer program for children living in one of Santiago, Chile's poorest areas. With your assistance, the Columban missionaries provided recreation, education and food for over 150 children during the summer.

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Next Year Is Now

A Visit to Pakistan

By Dáire King

Part of life while growing up was the occasional phone call I would receive from my uncle, Columban Fr. Tomás King, who is a missionary priest in Pakistan. Every conversation I had with him over the phone would include the question, “When are you coming to Pakistan, Dáire?” While I knew he was usually joking, it still made the phone call a little awkward as I was unable to tell him I had never planned on going to Pakistan to see him. I would always answer with, “Maybe next year.” I didn’t think I would ever go to Pakistan and never imagined myself wanting to go there. That was until my brother, Cathal, decided to call his bluff and visit Pakistan during his transition year.

Cathal is two years older than me and two years ahead of me in school. He did the unthinkable as far as many people were concerned and visited our uncle in Pakistan. I think he was extremely courageous to go to this

country along with our aunt, Mary. Tomás did have visitors from Ireland before, including his sisters and brother, but Cathal was the first of our generation in the family to visit. With him being the third youngest in the King family and my older brother, he really set an example for me and made me realize that when you have the opportunity you should take chances and be adventurous in life.

From what mainstream media has told us, we should not risk going to countries like Pakistan, but Cathal went against this and experienced it for himself and definitely debunked that myth. Following in his footsteps and after hearing how much Cathal enjoyed it, I decided, along with my cousin Eoin, to go to Pakistan during my transition year. I had to see for myself what uncle Tomás has been experiencing for the last 27 years.

My first day in Pakistan was somewhat overwhelming. I couldn’t believe that I was actually in Pakistan

with my cousin and uncle and not back in Ireland with them during one of uncle Tomás’s occasional visits home. One thing I noticed in Karachi, where we stayed for the first two days, was the smog. When we were in the streets of the city, distant buildings were not visible, and I could smell the accumulation of fumes and smoke. This was my first experience of smog, and I got a real sense of how air pollution affects the environment for the first time.

After doing some traveling around the city, I began to realize why there is so much smog. Over the two days in Karachi, I saw only a few bicycles, and it seemed to me that their motorcycles are like our bicycles. In every street we traveled, there were motorbikes carrying up to five people. In some cases, the motorbike is the family vehicle. The traffic was congested in the city, and it’s no wonder that the air is so polluted with all the fumes being emitted from the many motor vehicles.



Daire and Eoin with new Pakistani friends



L-R: Eoin, Daire and Fr. Tomas

In uncle Tomás's parish there was a rubbish dump that we visited, and this dump was a shocking sight to say the least. There was every kind of rubbish to be seen in large heaps that caused foul smells. We saw families working on the dump, sorting and even burning rubbish. Young children working to help their fathers earn less than a living. This dump showed me that while the government does not provide proper services to deal with all the rubbish that is produced and how to recycle it, some poor people collect the rubbish and sell what is reusable to eke out a precarious living for themselves. Seeing these children work in these conditions while others their age attend school in other countries really put things into perspective for me.

Following my uncle around the southern part of Pakistan I got to see him deal with many different people in difficult situations. He is always trying to help those who are in need and seeing him work so selflessly really inspired me to think about my own actions. His constant efforts to help people obtain basic needs like education made me realize how much we, people from developed countries, take for granted.

Thinking about my life in Ireland and seeing the Pakistani people struggle through each day really put my wealth into perspective, and I am not talking only about money. I really am blessed to be living in a place where education is free for everyone, there is no shortage of water, opportunities are endless, and dreams can be fulfilled with determination and hard work. What I used to call "hard work" would be a walk in the park for most of the people I met in Pakistan, who work tirelessly for their landlords just to be able to feed their families each day.

My visit to Pakistan was an eye-opener with the poverty that I witnessed first-hand. One thing that stood out to me was the generosity and kindness of the people no matter how bad their situation. We went to two remote villages where people lived in mud huts, and one of their biggest concerns at that time was to ensure we enjoyed our visit. They offered us a lovely dinner, and I don't think I had ever appreciated where the food came from as much as I did then. It felt like so much more than a dinner; it was a gift.

We also visited a parish where uncle Tomás used to be based, where

he and the Columban missionaries helped people break free from bonded labor by providing land to build houses on. When we visited the area, we saw that many houses were demolished illegally by the government officials who claimed falsely the land was being encroached upon.

While we observed the wreckage, a lady invited us over for tea as she boiled water on the ground near a tent where her house used to be. Her family found chairs for us to sit down beside their tent. As uncle Tomás talked to these people, it was very upsetting to see what they had to go through, and yet they wanted us to feel welcome, and they seemed to put us before themselves.

I have never felt as welcome in another country as I did in Pakistan, and I will definitely visit uncle Tomás out there in the future. Seeing how hard the people's lives are, I can understand why uncle Tomás devotes so much of his time to helping them. I am proud to call him my uncle. **CM**

Dáire King is a 16-year-old Transition Year Student in St. Jarleth's, Tuam, Ireland. He is the nephew of Columban Fr. Tomás King.



Meeting the locals



Enjoying new friends

“Father! Why Did You Come to Japan?”

“Why Did You Stay?”

By Fr. Barry Cairns

I never thought that my photo would be on the front cover of a book – admittedly with fourteen others! All of us, in our 80s, are foreign missionaries still working in Japan. The book in Japanese, is entitled “Father, why did you come to Japan?” with the further question: “Why are you still with us?” We fifteen missionary priests were interviewed by a Paulist Sister for the book. I am 88 and now semi-retired. I am a pastor and missionary in a very small parish in Yokohama City. So here are my answers to Sister’s questions.

In my last year of high school at times I had a realization that I possessed a great treasure in being a follower of Christ. I felt that I would like to share this treasure with others not so blessed. But then I also considered becoming a carpenter to build houses. I was better with my hands rather than my head. Well, I thought, let’s give the seminary a go! In 1949 I went to St. Columban’s to test my vocation as a missionary in other lands.

Then followed seven up and down years in the seminary. The two

years of philosophy were agony! In the following four years of theology and especially scripture I felt more at home. But mission history and anthropology were my favorite classes.

In 1955, at age 24, I was ordained in my home parish of Sts. Peter and Paul, Lower Hutt, New Zealand. I received a letter from my superior: “Barry, you are appointed to Japan.” To tell you the truth, I was not happy at all! Could I survive another two years of intensive study in a difficult foreign language? I had failed Latin in my University



Fr. Barry and young parishioners

Entrance Exam. Good marks in history got me through!

I arrived in Japan in 1956 after 31 days on a cargo ship from Sydney, with six port calls. After language school I was appointed to fishing villages. Japan was still staggering from the after effects of war. There was poverty, sickness (especially tuberculosis) and depression. Television had not yet come to the country villages where ancient customs and ways of thinking had not changed for centuries. I had learnt in my anthropology class for an expatriate to have a “cultural curiosity” towards one’s adopted country. Ask questions: Why? How? When? That was great advice! I came to know Japan and the Japanese and also began to learn the language.

But more was to come. I started teaching a class for people preparing for Baptism. I met Japanese with no religious affiliation and saw and felt the stark emptiness of their lives. One man said that his religion was the Osaka Hanshin Tigers baseball team. Having said that openly he realized how surface his life had become. My own faith strengthened together with the newly given faith of those in the class. The feeling of sharing a treasure that I had felt in high school came back to me strongly. I now belatedly thanked God for being so gentle with me by calling me to be a missionary in Japan.

One incident is still vivid in my memory. I was in charge of helping the poor with relief goods. One day a mother cradling her baby was in the queue. The baby was crying in gasps and was covered in a scarlet rash. I gave the mother rice and also a packet of milk powder. I told the mother that the milk was for her, not the baby. Two weeks later the mother returned full of joy. “My mother’s milk is coming again and my baby is getting better. “Arigato gozaimasu.” (Thank you).

After eleven years in Japan I got sick. I had big, fat swollen legs. It was *beri beri* and later complications. I spent nine months in the hospital. My faith, and consequently my call to be a priest, was sorely tested. The support of my Columban confreres and my parishioners helped me. I went home on sick leave. I was desolate. I thought that I had lost my faith. It took me three years before I realized that behind the sickness and desolation Christ was with me at all times. I feel I matured, both as a person and as a missionary priest. There is a Japanese proverb that says: “Suffering makes a jewel of you.” How true this was for me!

Then for thirteen years I was on the staff of the Columban seminary in Sydney as a spiritual director. I had a year with the Jesuits in California as preparation. I returned to Japan in 1983 after being away for sixteen years. It was a different Japan! My second culture shock was worse than the first! I was posted in three large and busy city parishes for 32 years. I am now, at 88, semi-retired as pastor of the smallest parish in Yokohama City (about 70 at Mass on Sunday). I stay in Japan because I feel called to live among the un-evangelized. I want to be beside the aged of Japan who feel so insecure about their future. I feel “at home” here, and likewise feel that the Japanese like me in their home.

Also I believe that the foreign missionary has a very small but important role in a church that even has many indigenous priests. We foreigners must be inculturated, but can act as a concrete example that the Church is for all nations—that it is truly catholic. Island countries, and their churches, can become insular.


To enter the digital missionary era our parish evangelization team puts my Sunday sermon, in Japanese and English, on the parish home page. It is

aimed at the myriad of shut-ins who surf the web. In each parish I have had a carpenter’s bench. Among the things that I have made are outdoor Christmas cribs. However, living in aged churches and rectories, I mend more than make and have become a carpenter!”

Finally, Sister asked me two questions: “What is your most pleasant, and your most unpleasant experience in Japan?”

My pleasant experience is this: The Bishop of Yokohama asked me to give a first-hand account of experience of mission to his seminarians. They come to the mission parish for weekends. I am now in my sixteenth year, so I know the young priests of the diocese and get on well with them.

My unpleasant experience is really trivial, but I still feel it! I was born in southern hemisphere in New Zealand. Christmas and its holiday means summer picnics and swimming in the sea. I still find a cold winter Christmas hard to take. I hear the song still popular in Japan: “I’m dreaming of a white Christmas.” It is never my dream! But I do let my snow white beard grow long. I dress up as Santa Claus for the children. We give them a small present, and I ask them to give their mothers and fathers a present by showing them at least one kind act. One mother told me that she wished there were 52 Christmases a year!

I feel called to be living among the un-evangelized nations, and pray with them and for them. I want to proclaim in a small way that our gentle God loves everyone unconditionally, as they are. It is by the grace of God that my enthusiasm for mission is still with me.” 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



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*One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and
He will repay him for his good deed. Proverbs 19:17*

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Columban lay missionary Noh Hyein, better known as Anna (pronounced En-na), a teacher by profession, lives and works in the Philippines. After getting to know the women in her parish, and realizing how desperately poor they were, Anna, with the help of Columban benefactors, launched a candle making livelihood project called “Light the Life.” The women make candles and earn income for their families. The program also helps in the holistic development of the women, making them value their own self-worth. The women in the program make candles that light the homes of others, but they are lighting their own paths as well.

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Acts of Kindness

Recently Pope Francis said, “Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships, from the anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic flurry of activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy.” Wow! Three or four good effects from one simple loving habit!

Recently I came across something I had been given many years (decades!) ago. It is a copy of a letter to a priest attributed to Mother Teresa. I decided to try to find out if it was authentic and went searching on the internet. I did not find that particular letter, but I found that she certainly did a lot of writing! And the letter that I had was in her writing style. Mother Teresa had a unique style that was at once simple and powerful. “look around and see – there are so many in the world who are lonely, unwanted, who have no one to call their own – maybe in our own home.” She encourages her correspondent to “be the sunshine of God’s love to your own – for this is where our love for each other must start.”

I must agree with her and with the Pope. I think the first step is to notice the problems facing those



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. John Burger

around us. If we start noticing others’ suffering and trying to respond to it, we will not ever be strangers to the concept of *kenosis*. It is the Greek word for self-relinquishing. It is used in theology to describe that self-emptying that Jesus did by living among us. “But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

If we are to be imitators of Christ and the saints, emptying ourselves in service of others has to be part of our vocation as Christians. And the daily effort to understand and help heal others’ hurts should be a foundation stone of our approach to the spiritual life.

There are many signs that we are on the right track: joy, peace, hope. Are we able to face life’s



There are many signs that we are on the right track: joy, peace, hope.

large and small injustices and not lose hope? Do we have hope in enough abundance that we can share it with the young, with the materially poor, the lonely, despairing old? If our kindness is not superficial but rather comes from a spirit of that depth, then wherever we live our lives, we are living out the mystery of Jesus’ mission.

The theme of this issue of Columban Mission appears to me to be “acting with kindness.” If we take the Christian life seriously, we know that what Jesus taught and that everything Jesus did encourages and indeed challenges us His followers to “go and do likewise.”

Fr. John

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— LUKE 5:10

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