

# The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

July 2015



**From Seoul to the Sierra**  
A Korean Missionary in Peru

**Evicted in the Twenty First Century**  
Dispossessed families in the Philippines

**Let it be quick**  
An encounter with guerrillas



**ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY**

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# The Far East

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Families in the Philippines can be displaced by natural disasters and by being evicted from their land. (See Fr Bobby Gilmore's story pages 6-7).

Photo: Citizens Disaster Response Centre ([www.cdrc-phil.com](http://www.cdrc-phil.com))



# From the Editor

## In the footsteps of St Columban of old

St Columban died in the year 615AD at the monastery he had founded at Bobbio in the mountains of northern Italy. This year marks the 1400th anniversary of his death. He was well past middle age when he led a group of 12 monks to leave their monastery in their native Ireland and become missionaries in what are now France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy.

St Columban became the patron of the new Missionary Society that began in Ireland in 1918 and in Australia and New Zealand in 1920 - "The Missionary Society of St Columban". Like St Columban and his fellow monks of old, modern day Columban Missionaries are spread throughout today's world in all kinds of missionary situations.

The stories and articles in the July issue of The Far East magazine come from Columban Missionaries working in a great variety of countries and situations just like St Columban and his monks of old.

In July, two Columbans, Frs. Paul McGee and Robert Brennan celebrate the 50th anniversary of their

ordination to priesthood. You can read about their missionary journeys in this issue. Fr. Sean McDonagh shares with us the story of his care for an injured and endangered Filipino eagle. St Columban like all saints of the Celtic tradition had a great reverence for all of God's Creation.

Fr. Donal O'Keeffe, the Columban Director in Korea, writes about his visit to a Columban priest from Korea working in the Andes Mountains of Peru. The story of "The Inexhaustible Cup", an icon found at the Columban headquarters in Korea, is told by Fr. Sean Conneely.

Fr. Bobby Gilmore shares a story of the dispossession of a family from their home in the Philippines. Columban Sr Grace de Leon tells us about her encounter with Communist guerrillas in the remote mountains of the Philippines. Columban Lay Missionary Vida Hequilan shares her story of working in the mountains of Taiwan with youth from the Atayal Tribal group where she has lived and worked for the past nine years.

Learning a language different from one's native tongue can be a difficult

task. Fr. Eamonn Horgan who has lived in Japan for more than 60 years, gives us a story about one such endeavour.

As we commemorate the 1400th anniversary of St Columban's death this year, let us remember the modern day Columban Missionaries as they follow in St Columban's footsteps, leaving home to live amongst people different from their own.

*Fr Daniel Harding*

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Listen to: From Seoul to the Sierra

# From Seoul to the Sierra

FR DONAL O'KEEFFE

*Columban Fr Donal O'Keeffe, the Columban Director in Korea, writes of his visit to the Peruvian Andes to visit a young Korean Columban priest working there.*

“

*The people have a deep spirituality and sense of God.*



Photo: Columbans



PERU



KOREA

In September 2014 I had the opportunity to visit the town of Yanaoca in the Sierra of Peru. Yanaoca (altitude 3,800 metres) is about an hour's drive from Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire. I was visiting with Fr. Gregorio Young-In Kim a Korean Columban priest who has been in Peru since 2010, and who is working in the Sierra since early 2014.

The Peruvian Sierra is the vast Andean mountainous area where the people engage in agriculture in the lower altitude regions and in the higher regions the people are herders looking after their flocks of cattle, llamas or alpacas. The land is usually owned by the local community and is either cultivated jointly or redistributed annually. Houses are made from dry clay bricks (*adobe*) and clothes are very colourful - woven locally using traditional dyes. The language spoken among the people is Quechua with its own local variants depending on the area.

Fr. Gregorio is following in the footsteps of Columban Fr. Paul Prendergast from New Zealand who worked there since the 1980s and who is now retired living in the parish of Yanaoca. Fr. Paul pioneered the Columban outreach to the Sierra. While working in Lima he met many people from the mountain area and would visit there in summer with small groups to share faith and eventually he was appointed to work there. From the beginning he learned the Quechua language and preached in it. The people, having suffered colonization, believed that things Spanish were far superior to their own language and traditions so Paul insisted that all parish meetings were in Quechua and that

religious ceremonies be conducted in Quechua. He also organized workshops to teach parishioners trades, such as carpentry, computers, auto mechanics and sewing.

Catholicism of course came with the colonizers. The early Spanish missionaries set up their own base in Cuzco and began their evangelization from the ancient capital of the Inca People. They promoted devotion to the saints to challenge the worship of indigenous spirits and also to make the message more tangible to communities that might have the Eucharist only irregularly. The missionaries invited a group of artists from Spain to Cuzco to encourage and develop religious painting among the local people. The result was a blossoming of indigenous religious art - there are shrines and statues to the local saints everywhere. St James the apostle is the patron Saint of Yanaoca parish and in the sanctuary of the Church there is a huge life size statue of him riding a horse with a sword in hand conquering the infidels!

The people have a deep spirituality and sense of God. They seek the blessing of the Church for their families. I travelled with Fr. Gregorio to Lithivaca parish where he was to do a wedding Mass. Two couples had their marriages blessed on that day - one in traditional dress and the other couple in a white dress. Both were accompanied by their children and their families. Living together for many years the couples were now in the position economically to celebrate with friends and family at the Church.

While the sense of the sacred is very real, the absence of on-going formation has resulted in an emphasis on externals with a tendency at

times for a faith bordering on the superstitious. Thus the faith formation of the local communities is a key challenge in the Diocese of Sicuani. The major priority of Bishop Peter Bustamante Lopez - the first Peruvian to lead the diocese - is to build up a group of priests and sisters who will be catalysts in organizing this formation. To that end he visited Korea in early 2014 to invite the Korean Church to send missionaries to his diocese. Presently along with Fr. Gregorio there are three other Korean missionaries in Sicuani - two priests on loan from Suwon Diocese and one Columban Sister, Sr. Sabina Choi Hye-Sook. All have just begun work in the Sierra in the last two years. For Fr. Gregorio that means beginning the study of Quechua and he has already registered at a school in the provincial capital, Cuzco.

The missionary outreach from Korea to Peru is not one-way traffic! Sisters from Peru, members of the Mercedarian Sisters of Charity, work in Korea today. For example Sr. Inez, a talented artist from Arequipa in the Sierra, works in Seoul exploring how to spread the Gospel through the medium of art and painting. She and Fr. Gregorio are members of a new generation of missionaries from different local churches who are creating an intricate web of relationships between peoples and diverse cultures throughout the world. Cross-cultural mission today continues to promote the gospel values of caring and love and strengthens our global community.

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*Columban Fr Donal O'Keeffe has been a missionary in Korea since 1976.*



# Evicted in the Twenty First Century

FR BOBBY GILMORE

*I*mages of evictions in Irish history stick in one's memory like jam on a new shirt. Seeing poor men, women and children, with their few belongings on the side of the road while their cabin is wrecked behind them by a bunch of thugs unfortunately is not a 19 century phenomenon. It was prevalent in the last century and is common in this one.

Elena, a woman in her late 20's arrived at the church door carrying a few bags of her bits and pieces. Her older two children aged seven and eight carried their clothes in plastic bags. The baby she carried in her arms while the four-year-old clung on to her skirts. They looked deprived, desolate and were destitute.

She and her husband migrated from the central Philippines to the island of Mindanao with their families as teenagers. There land had been opened by logging companies and when they moved out, their families moved in, cleared a few acres, built shacks, cultivated the land and planted food crops needed for their survival. Other families moved into the area and over time a village emerged.

After marrying in their early 20's, Elena and her husband Lucio took over a piece of vacant land and did as their parents did. They were assured that this was government land open for occupation and cultivation. Having cleared a few acres they planted the usual food crops for their immediate needs. Looking ahead they put down coffee plants and assorted fruit trees that would supplement their meagre incomes as time went on. They would need the money for the schooling of their children, one of which was expected in a few months. As the years came and went they prospered and extended their holding by a few more acres where they grazed a cow, a pig and a few goats.

The family increased to four. All were healthy and loved visiting their grandparents who lived nearby. Then disaster struck with the arrival of a man in a jeep from the nearby town. He parked his jeep on the edge of the road and approached their house. He had a wad of papers that he wished Lucio and Elena to see. These papers, according to him, were titles to the property that Lucio and Elena had been living on and cultivating. He was here to claim his

property and was ordering them to leave. Lucio and Elena told the man that they were the owners of the property as they were the first settlers after the loggers left. They had ascertained that there was no owner when they settled on it other than the government. As the stranger departed he warned them that they should pack up and leave within a week. This was a regular ploy used by people of influence to grab property after it was cleared and developed.

The following week he returned and threatened them using his gun. A fight ensued as Lucio stood up to the man protecting his property and family. Elena pleaded with Lucio to desist but in the heat of the moment he didn't hear her. At the end of the affray the land grabber took off in his jeep but died a few days later from his injuries.

The police arrived, arrested Lucio, detained him, beat a confession out of him and charged him with murder. Elena and her family did not have the wherewithal to hire a lawyer. She could not use the untitled property as collateral to borrow money for a lawyer. Lucio was convicted and went to prison for life. After the sentencing the land-grabber's son arrived with the police, sequestered the property and evicted Elena and the children. She had no option but to leave. Neither Elena nor her family had the necessary political influence to confront the police, the land registration office or the courts. She just packed what she had and left for the nearest city. Here she and her children were destitute looking for help, reduced to being beggars, desperate, exposed to all kinds of exploitation.

She ended her story by saying that she could do seamstress work and if she had a little money she would sell and buy vegetables in the market. But the heart-wrenching part of the story was that she was offering the two older children to me to care for. I suggested that the situation was not that desperate that they would be parted from their mother. Together we looked at what options she had: to

be a seamstress she needed a sewing machine, to conduct business in the market start-up finance was needed. She also needed accommodation.

I called the Sisters at the school and related the story and inquired about possible accommodation space. They responded positively and after talking with Elena recognised a person with personal and skills resources. Next step was getting the older children to school. With a small interest free loan Elena rented a stall in the market and bought and sold vegetables in the early part of the morning leaving her free to get the older children to school and mind the others. The Sisters through their casual networks found her seamstress jobs. Both she and the family thrived. She made regular heart-breaking visits with the children to the hovel that was the provincial jail to visit Lucio. They had no recourse other than to bear his incarceration and their separation. She stared the painful truth of injustice in the face and persevered without pessimism or cynicism. In doing so she was unwittingly but effectively nurturing her resources to do the best for herself and the children.

*The sacrifices, the violence, the struggle, the separation, the destitution, the loneliness, the anguish, the fear experienced by Elena is an everyday experience of poor people, particularly women, in the developing world.*

If she was not aware of the presence, in this case, of the church network, what would be Elena's options? I dread to think of her and the children ending up in forced slavery which is the lot of millions of her counterparts in the developing world. We wonder, here in Ireland and Europe, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Canada why poor destitute people are ending up on our shores as asylum seekers and economic migrants.

---

*Columban Fr. Bobby Gilmore now works in Ireland with migrants and refugees.*



# Icons in Korea

PETER RICHMOND

*Part One: Peter Richmond and his wife Mairin on a visit to Korea from Ireland were surprised to find an icon in the Columban House there. Here is their story.*

During January we stayed for a few days with Fr. Sean Conneely and the Columban Fathers in their house in Seoul. Fr. Sean hails from the same locality in Ireland as my wife Mairin and our visit was made all the more interesting and enjoyable with help from Fr. Sean and his colleagues. Sean took us to the Gyeongbok Palace, the Royal Palace dating from the 14th century. They also introduced us to a few restaurants where we had the most delicious meals. Sean also helped orient us on the subway so that we could quickly find our own way around.

However the biggest surprise for me was seeing hanging on the wall in the Columban House dining room, a truly superb hand painted icon of the Mother of God in the style I usually associate with Orthodox churches in Europe.

My own interest in icons was stimulated by a book, *'The meaning of icons'* by Lossky and Ouspensky. This book was given to my wife Mairin and I as a wedding present by our friends Ruth and Godfrey O'Donnell who live in Dublin where Godfrey is a Romanian Orthodox priest. For a while I did no more than pick up the book from time to time and gaze at the fascinating images.

However my interest in them was further stimulated in 2010 when a fellow physicist took me to an icon gallery (*russian-icon.com*) in Tallinn during a visit to Estonia. This led to my first acquisition of a 19th century painting of the ascent of the prophet Elijah to the fiery heavens. Since then I have acquired other examples of Russian icons including this 19th century icon of the Mother of God Fedorovskaya, painted by the Mstiorskaya school of icon painting of Mstera, Central Russia.

I now find myself actively seeking out icons in galleries, museums or churches whenever I can. In October 2014 I was in Sofia, Bulgaria, and visited the superb exhibition of Bulgarian icons in the crypt of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral. A visit to Thessaloniki in Greece in November 2014 provided another chance to see some beautiful icons in the local churches. The internet is also an excellent route to viewing icons in museums and galleries across the world.

However I never expected to see any icons on our visit to Seoul. To find one in the house of the Columban Fathers was a big surprise. But then to be told that it had been painted by one of the House administrators – well as we say back home – you could have knocked me over with a feather! A truly beautiful painting it was similar to the Novgorod icon of *"The Mother of God of the Sign"* but unlike any icon I had seen, now the child was within a cup located in front of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*).



*Part Two: Columban Fr Sean Conneely responds to Peter's story.*



*W*e don't have many foreign visitors in Korea and when we do it's always a pleasant experience. Each person brings their own experience of life.

As Peter shared above in his story the main thing that caught his eye the first time he came into our dining room was the icon on the front wall. He stood for a moment in admiration of the painting and asked me where we got it. I told him it was painted by one of our staff. He mentioned that he'd like to meet her while he was with us. As often happens with visitors with their busy sight-seeing schedule and me busy with my work, it was the morning of the last day that I had time to bring Peter and Mairin to meet Eva Byun our Columban magazine editor in her office. For the next two hours I sat stunned as the two shared knowledge of icons they knew. They opened up Icon sites in their computers and Peter shared new icon sites with Eva.

Then Eva told us how she got to know more about the icon she painted by visiting many cities and monasteries in Russia till she eventually found the original painting.

The name of the icon is "*The Inexhaustible Cup*". There is a healing story related to it: how a poor alcoholic peasant travelled for miles to get cured because he saw the icon in a dream. Since then many addicts have been known to be cured by praying to this icon.

As a person who works with addicts the icon has taken on a new meaning and interest for me and now I refer people to pray to the child Jesus in the cup for healing. And since then if I'm alone in the dining room before going to bed for the night I take some time to pray before the icon and to take the icon image into my heart for the night.

Apart from the icons the other surprise for me on this occasion was to see how God brought two people, Peter and Eva, of so different backgrounds together through their mutual interest in Orthodox Church icons and how these help them both in their spiritual awareness. Surely our God is a God of many surprises. One never knows when a messenger from God will visit our home.



Thank you Peter and Mairin for a surprise visit.

---

*Columban Fr Sean Conneely has worked for many years in Korea.*

# Let it be quick

SR GRACE DE LEON

*D*arkness had fallen on the mountain. Inside the house the mother, Rosario, was cooking the vegetables and rice for the evening meal while her four children played and laughed around the kitchen. I was staying with the family while working with the tribal people in the Philippines. This was in the late 90's; I had been there for four years.

Suddenly a shout rang out, "Who's there?" The laughter stopped; I clutched the baby tightly, the mother froze. Again, louder this time, "Who's there?" The mother went to the door. "Me and my children." "Who else?" "Me and my children," she repeated. She glanced at me, mouthing 'NPA' (New People's Army, the Communist insurrection movement). The soldier trained his gun on her. "You have a guest. Who is it?" She was silent. She knew she was facing soldiers who would shoot her and her children.

Quickly, I got up and handed her the baby. "You are looking for me. Leave them alone." My heart was thumping, my knees trembling.

"Come," the leader barked, pulling me out the door. Surrounded by his men we walked up to the top of the mountain, an hour's journey. I knew they were the guerrillas who terrorized the tribal people of the hillsides, forcing them to hand over rice and chickens and whatever vegetables they had. We had heard of the people's suffering and Bishop Cabrera of the Diocese of Alaminos in Pangasinan had asked us Columban Sisters to help. No one had visited the people and neither he nor we knew how to make contact. Then we got the idea of going to the local market and seeing if the tribal people came down to sell

their goods. Sure enough I met some of the people from the Kankanaey and Ibaloy tribes and told them of our desire to help them if we could.

A short time later a few of the women took me to meet some of the leaders. We sat around while I asked them what their needs were. "We cannot till the land," one man spoke. "The NPA have taken all our carabaos (water-buffalo) and now we have no rice; our people are starving. Look at our children, their bellies are swollen, their eyes sunk in their skulls." I saw so many of the listless little ones.

If they could not till the land they were doomed. I went back down the mountain determined to get carabaos for them. And, by God's providence and the generosity of many people, including readers of The Far East, we raised enough money to buy a good number of animals. Almost at once their situation changed. Their health improved; their children grew strong; they sang tribal songs again.

I met regularly with the leaders who organized the distribution of the carabaos so that each farmer could have one for a time until we had enough for all. "Now we eat three times a day", one man said to me, with a wide smile. The leaders worked with me and saw that there was a fair distribution, that everyone was helped. When a carabao had a calf, that calf could be kept and so gradually the stock built up.

This was the reason I was now surrounded by fifteen guerrillas, their guns trained on me. I was terrified. The interrogation began. Where had I come from? What did I mean by giving the farmers the animals? Who was behind this? It went on and on.



COURAGE



*"O Lord," I prayed silently, "give me a clear mind. Don't let me panic. Stand with me." And then, suddenly, I remembered vividly the training we had undergone each week when I was in Peru some years before. Training on what to do if the Sendero Luminoso, the Shining Path terrorists attacked us: 'Don't panic. Challenge them.' So I told the men the money came from people who cared deeply for the poor. I told them I was a missionary sister. I told them I knew they would kill me, already their guns were pointed on me. "But," I said, "you will be the loser. Your children will suffer. Your wives will be shunned. You will lose face before all the people, especially the tribes. Already you steal their food; you destroy their lives. But people will not stand for it if you kill me. As for me, I have no children; I have no money; I have nothing to lose. Go ahead and kill me. But let me tell you that there will be an outcry not only in this country, but people all over will condemn you because I belong to an international congregation with Sisters in the East and in the West."*

In my trembling heart I was praying, *"Lord, let it be quick. Don't let them torture me; I'm so afraid."* I was amazed that my voice was so steady, as though I was fearless. I remembered the words of Jesus, *"Don't worry on what to say, the Spirit will give you the words."* The men sat in silence. A few of them went aside arguing about me. Then the leader came back and said, *"We'll let you go now. But if you tell anyone we'll come after you."* And they roughly shoved me down the path. Oh, the relief! I was still scared but how I thanked God over and over.

Later that day I met with the tribal leaders and told them, *"I'm all right,"* I told them, *"But I can't talk about it."*

*"Lord, let it be quick.  
Don't let them torture  
me; I'm so afraid."*



*Sr Grace de Leon*

They understood. I told them we would go ahead and visit the eight families who had been promised funds; this was the last of the money we had received and I wanted to finish the work before I returned to the convent. So

for the next four days I went around with the men until we finished the distribution and saw that everyone was seen to. The people protected me. I knew I would not see them again and my heart was breaking at having to leave them.

Back with the convent community I was nervous, checking doors and windows, startled at the slightest sound, tense all the time. Finally the Sisters sat me down. *"What happened, Grace?"* So I told them. Of course they were very shocked and at once made plans to get me to Manila and eventually out of the country.

---

*Sr Grace de Leon is a Filipina Columban Sister who has worked in Peru, Hong Kong, the US and the Philippines.*

rage

# St Columban and caring for God's creation

FR SEAN MCDONAGH



Anybody who visits the European sites of the monasteries founded by St Columban cannot but be struck by the beauty of their natural setting. Like other early Irish saints, finding God in creation came naturally to St Columban.

Many legends grew up around him in at the monastery he founded in Luxeuil in north east France. Squirrels and doves were pictured playing in the folds of his cowl. Birds also approached him and nestled in the palms of his hands. Even wild beasts obeyed his commands.

His biographer the monk, Jonas, relates how St Columban once withdrew to the forest in order to fast and pray. The food ran out and all he and the young monk Chagnoald had to eat were crab apples. However, when Chagnoald went to collect the apples he found a hungry bear eating them. He returned to St Columban for directions. St Columban ordered

him to go back to the orchard and to divide it in two halves, one for the bear and one for the monks.

Jonas recalls another occasion when St Columban was walking and praying in the forest near Luxeuil. He was confronted by a pack of wolves. He remained completely still and prayed *Deus in adiutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina (God come to my aid; O Lord make haste to help me)*. The wolves approached and touched his habit, but instead of harming him they wandered off.

On another occasion when St Columban was looking for a quiet place in which to pray near the nearby monastery at Annegray, France, he came on what he considered to be an ideal place. Unfortunately it was a bear's den, but, far from being frightened by the experience, St Columban ordered the bear to leave the place and never to return. The bear duly did so and found another den further away from Annegray.

On another day at meal time St Columban took off his working gloves and left them at the door of the refectory. While the monks were eating, a raven swooped down and carried off one of the gloves. Jonas writes that he told the monks that he would not feed the chicks of the raven until the latter had returned the stolen glove. Immediately, as the monks watched, the raven flew down with the glove in its beak and dropped it in front of St Columban, and the bird did not fly away until he gave it permission to do so.

St Columban and his monks clearly found God in the created world around them. In his sermon on grace we find, *"Seek no further concerning God; for those who wish to know the great depth (of God) must first learn about creation."* Further on in the same sermon there is a sentence which could become the mantra for Creation Theology, *Intellige, si vis scire Creatorem, creaturam (If you wish to know the Creator, learn about creatures)*.



Centuries later St Thomas Aquinas wrote, *“God brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures and be represented by them; and because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures so that, what was wanting to one in the manifestation of the divine goodness, might be supplied by another, . . . and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better, than any single creature whatsoever”.* (Summa Theologica Part 1, Question 47, article 1).

So other species also reveal God in ways that humans do not and cannot. My own experience of this came many years ago in Lake S’bu in the mountains of South Cotabato in the Philippines. One evening a group of fishermen brought a Philippine eagle over to my house. A flock of *kalaw* (hornbills) had forced this young eagle down on to Lake S’bu and its talons became entangled in the fishermen’s nets.

Because we had preached so much about protecting God’s creation, the fishermen didn’t kill the bird. Instead, they brought it over to my place where we built a makeshift aviary. We sent for a vet from the Philippine Eagle Foundation in Davao City because we thought the bird had been injured. For the next few days hundreds of people from the T’boli indigenous community came from all over the mountain to view this magnificent creature. It stood more than three feet tall and had a wing span of more than six feet. Everything about the bird was stunning – its eyes, its beak and its front plumage. After the bird had been treated by the vet, we released it back into the wild. I remember being struck by the power of its wings in flight.



*St Columban and his monks clearly found God in the created world around them.*

While marvelling at the beauty of the eagle, I experienced incredible sadness at the thought that I and those watching were the last generation of humans which would see the Philippine eagle in the wild. We are living in the sixth largest extinction of life on earth since life began 3.8 billion years ago. We have comprehensive data on about two million species, but there could be thousands of others we do not know about. We could lose up to a third of or half the species on the planet - all of which mirror God in a particular way - over the next 50 years. May the memory of St Columban cause us to prevent any further loss of God’s wondrous creatures.

---

*Columban Fr Seán McDonagh worked for many years in the Philippines as a missionary priest. He is the author of numerous books and articles on ecology.*



全論大会

# BENRON TAIKAI 2015

JAPANESE SPEECH CONTEST

## Akiko never did cry!

FR EAMONN HORGAN

*Columban Fr Eamonn Horgan shares with us insights into Japanese society gained from living there for over 60 years.*

*In Japan a phenomenon missionaries and, in fact, most foreigners from tourists to professionals, will encounter is the difficulty most Japanese have with conversational English. In all schools up to and including universities, thousands of hours per school year are devoted to the study of English. Yet, with very rare exceptions, neither they nor their tutors will be capable of sustaining a two minute conversation in basic English.*

*Historians and linguists blame this phenomenon on the two and half centuries of Japan's strictly enforced total separation as a nation from the rest of the world after the hideous persecution following Japan's 'Christian Century'. This total isolation from the then known world was total.*

*Eventually, however, in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries during the Meiji Restoration Era when Japan resumed contacts, political and commercial, with the West, "English", the current international language, written and spoken, became essential. However, over a century since then, the linguistic barrier maintained during the centuries of isolation has, even to this day, defied all efforts at demolition.*

*No missionary will be long in the country before he is hesitatingly approached and politely asked to coach individuals or, more often, small groups, in the rudiments of spoken English. Early in his career he himself will be struggling with the intricacies of Japanese language study. So he will readily identify with the problems of the requesters and not infrequently will agree to try.*

*To illustrate, I shall perhaps be forgiven for citing one such case.*

*M*y remote mountain parish was Ryujin, in central Japan, where life was idyllic and 'every prospect pleased'. One sunny Sunday afternoon in mid-Autumn, Sunday Mass and activities, including dinner, concluded, as I dozed in my front room to the strains of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, a car pulled into the chapel yard.

Emerging were a youngish high-school teacher whom I had previously met and a well dressed and mature looking young lady I took to be a college student. Greeting them at the front door I invited them in. To my surprise the teacher introduced the lady as his younger sister, Akiko,

a high-school student. After a brief exchange of pleasantries over a cup of tea, the teacher somewhat hesitantly began to broach the object of his visit.

His sister had been preparing for a Benron Taikaian English speech contest to be held two months hence in the provincial capital, Osaka. Was there any chance I might coach her for the ordeal? My unhesitating reply was, 'Of course I should be happy to. However, I must inform the young lady that I am an absolute 'oniU', a monster. I will accept nothing short of 105% perfection'.

Addressing her, face to face, I declared, 'I will probably make you cry'. Fearlessly her eye met mine'. And the message I read in that eye was, *'This old geezer is not going to make me cry'*.

The typed copies of her prepared contest speech told of a school trip she and her classmates had recently made to Nagasaki, a city with a long Christian tradition. They had visited atom-bombed sites and many of the city's Christian churches, most of them now rebuilt. The A-bomb Museum with its gruesome exhibits had left them horrified.

The English of her speech copy was quite good. She obviously had had help. Little more than slight cosmetic adjustments were needed. We agreed that she would come for coaching at 2.00pm every Sunday between then and the contest day exactly two months away.

The following Sunday Akiko turned up punctually at 2.00pm as scheduled. That day's two hour period was devoted exclusively to

basic vowel sounds. Japanese tend to speak with lips only slightly parted. Centuries of life in a small country, 83% uninhabitably mountainous, the remaining 17% supporting a large population, meant that voices had to be kept at low levels to avoid disturbing neighbours living in houses separated by, at most, two or three metres. Less than soundproof paper walls or screens divided interiors.

Hence, our first lesson was spent solely repeating each vowel sound up to a hundred times or more. To my great relief my pupil never flinched though the experience must have been woefully boring if not actually painful as her over-worked jaw muscles must have ached as never before. At lesson's end she smilingly thanked me and gallantly declared that she had enjoyed the lesson and looked forward to our further weekly encounters.

True to her word my pupil invariably showed up punctually for all subsequent lessons. Practice progressed from endless

repetition of single vowel sounds to individual words, then simple basic sentences. Her ear seemed uncommonly sharp and her diction bit by bit became more and more precise. Both of us gradually began to enjoy the weekly exercise. We also began daring to hope.

The two months flew by and on the Sunday before the contest, with her brother present, over a cup of tea we voiced our hopes and fears. I assured Akiko that even if she felt a bit stressed she shouldn't worry. Moderate stress would ensure a sharper performance. Thanking me profusely, her brother expressed a wish to recompense me for my time and efforts. Firmly declining his kind offer

I stated that the compensation I really wanted was twofold. Next Sunday when they came to report on the contest, they should bring two items, the Trophy and a box of Fuji apples.

Well, the following Sunday as before, at the usual time the car pulled into the yard. From the passenger's side emerged a

handsome 4 foot high trophy followed by my beaming pupil. Her brother, opening the trunk, produced not one box of Fuji apples but two!

Inviting them inside I had the housekeeper produce the usual cup of tea and accessories. Delight reigned. Akiko made particular mention of my reassurances about stress which had only strengthened her resolve.

She had had three judges, two Japanese scholars of English from separate universities and one American. The Japanese complimented on her diction, posture and gestures and on her smile as she spoke her lines.

The American inquired how long had she spent in Ireland!!

By the way, Akiko never did cry.



Photo: [www.bigstockphoto.com](http://www.bigstockphoto.com)



# Mission World

**We ask your prayers:** *The prayers of our readers are requested for the repose of the souls of friends and benefactors of the Missionary Society of St Columban who died recently and for the spiritual and the temporal welfare of all our readers, their families and friends.*

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## Removing poverty from the Gospel

*Below is a summary of the homily of Pope Francis given during the Eucharist on Tuesday the 16th of June, 2015. He refers to the First Reading of the Eucharist of the day - 2 (Corinthians 8:1-9)*

Pope Francis says that if you remove poverty from the Gospel, you cannot understand the message of Jesus. According to Vatican Radio, the Holy Father spoke of this theme during his daily morning Mass at Casa Santa Marta on June 16th, 2015.

In his homily, Francis reflected on the contrast between wealth and poverty, and reaffirmed how it is unfair to call priests or bishops who speak of the poor, "communists."

The Holy Father recalled how St. Paul organized a collection in the Church of Corinth for the Church of Jerusalem whose people were living in difficult times of poverty.

"Today, as then," Francis observed, poverty is "a word that always embarrasses."

"Many times," he said, "we hear: 'But this priest talks too much of poverty, this bishop speaks of poverty, this Christian, this nun talks about poverty ... But they're a bit 'communist,' right?'" To this, Francis responded, "Poverty is at the very centre of the Gospel. If we remove poverty from the Gospel, you would not understand anything about the message of Jesus."

When St. Paul spoke to the Church of Corinth, the 78-year-old Pontiff said, the Apostle highlighted what was their real wealth.

St Paul told them, "*You are rich in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and love that we have taught you. As you are rich, you are also great for this generous work*" in "this collection."

"If you have much wealth in the heart, zeal, charity, the Word of God, the knowledge of God," the Pope noted, you need to give to the poor. "*When faith does not come with pockets, [it is] not a genuine faith.*"

"There is this contrast between wealth and poverty," Francis said. "*The Church of Jerusalem is poor, is in economic difficulty, but it is rich, because it has the treasure of the Gospel message. And this Church of Jerusalem, poor, has enriched the Church of Corinth with the Gospel message.*"

"From poverty comes wealth", Francis added, saying, "*it is a mutual exchange.*"

The foundation of the "theology of poverty," Francis stressed, is this: "*Jesus Christ was rich - from the wealth of God - and was made poor. He lessened himself for us.*"

The Argentine Pontiff also pointed out that from here, we have the meaning of the first Beatitude, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" That is, "*being poor is letting oneself be enriched by the poverty of Christ and not wanting to be rich with other riches that are not those of Christ.*"

The Pope stressed that simply helping the poor with the excess that one has is not what St. Paul had in mind. Instead, the Pontiff stressed, St Paul is wishing that people truly give of themselves.

When one gives up something, he noted, "*but which is not only from abundance,*" to give to the poor, the Pope said, this "enriches me."

"Jesus is acting in me when I do this," Pope Francis said.

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Vatican City State, June 16, 2015  
[www.zenit.org/en](http://www.zenit.org/en)

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## Mission Intention for July

That, amid social inequalities, Latin American Christians may bear witness to love for the poor and contribute to a more fraternal society.



# From the Director

## In the Footsteps of St Columban

Next month I am accompanying a group of Columban supporters on pilgrimage 'In the Footsteps of St Columban' to commemorate the 1400th anniversary of St Columban's death. Our group is made up of 38 pilgrims, with 33 pilgrims from Australia, 3 from New Zealand, 1 from Korea and 1 from Taiwan.

The response to the pilgrimage has been so positive that we could have taken more pilgrims but there is no accommodation left in Bobbio (where St Columban died) because of the St Columban anniversary celebrations.

What strikes me as extraordinary is that St Columban died 1400 years ago yet his life still exerts an influence in Europe, where many groups called, 'Friends of St Columban', keep his memory alive.

This is the first Australian pilgrimage 'In the Footsteps of St Columban' and I hope not the last. Groups from Ireland, America and Korea have gone on the pilgrimage before us, including a pilgrimage made up solely of 'young' Columban priests from our mission countries. In a sense the trail has already been blazed!

We will follow the trail that St Columban and his band of monks travelled from Ireland to France, to Austria, to Switzerland and over the Alps to Bobbio, Italy.

St Columban and his monks suffered what was referred to as a 'white' martyrdom. They never returned to Ireland but went to Europe to preach the Good News. They walked from Ireland to Italy - they did take a ship to France. We will travel by bus in Ireland and Europe and fly from Dublin to Luxeuil-les-Bains in France. St Columban was about 70 years old when he and his monks walked over the Swiss Alps into northern Italy and settled in Bobbio. Our age bracket dictates that a bus is the best way to travel with some possibilities for those who wish to walk in the footsteps of the monks.

*Our Missionary Society adopted a phrase from St Columban's writing as our motto: **Christi simus non nostri - we belong to Christ, not to ourselves.***

We will meet some of these 'Friends of St Columban' on the 30th August in Bobbio where St Columban died and was buried in 615. Dignitaries, both civil and ecclesiastical will celebrate the 1400th anniversary of St Columban's life and achievements.

Fr Dan Harding, the editor of The Far East magazine, completed the St Columban pilgrimage some years ago and refers to St Columban in his editorial. He writes, "let us remember the

*modern day Columban missionaries as they follow in St Columban's footsteps, leaving home to live amongst people different from their own."* Our Missionary Society adopted a phrase from St Columban's writings as our motto: *Christi simus non nostri - we belong to Christ, not to ourselves.*

Fr. Tommy Murphy, a former Columban Superior General, who has studied the life and works of St Columban, will lead us into an understanding of St Columban's life and times, his challenges and trials, his powerful mind and personality. Along the way we will learn about Celtic spirituality and visit monastic sites in Ireland. We will visit the headquarters of the Columban Fathers there and also the Columban Sisters, enjoy the beautiful countryside of Ireland, eastern France, Lake Constance, the Swiss Alps, the Apennine Mountains in Italy and wind up our tour in Rome.

Anyone interested in a pilgrimage in 2016?

*You can follow the Columban pilgrimage 'In the Footsteps of St Columban' via our Columban website and/or Columban social media. [www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)*

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au

# Things will unfold in God's own time

VIDA HEQUILAN

*Columban Lay Missionary, Vida Hequilan, from the Philippines, describes her work in Taiwan amongst young people of indigenous ethnic groups of the Taiwanese mountains.*

*I*'ve been working in Taiwan among the indigenous peoples called Atayal at the TaiAn Nansancun parish for nine years now. One of my goals when I started working in the parish nine years ago on my first three year term as a Columban Lay Missionary was to revive the youth group that the first Columban priest in the parish, Fr. Tom Browning, had formed. However, it proved to be very challenging for me. Some of the former members of the youth group were now married with children. Others were now working in the lowlands. My inadequate Mandarin language skills also limited my ability to communicate with the former youth group members.

After three years, I returned for a second three year term as a Columban Lay Missionary to the same parish. I now decided to fully commit myself to start a new youth group rather than reviving the old one, but again it did not transpire. The young people in the villages that comprise the parish would not attend house prayer meetings and Masses. Older people and little children were the regular churchgoers. When I asked the older women in the parish why this was so, they told me that teenagers were not interested in coming to Mass and prayers. When I heard that, I felt hopeless. The goal I set for myself just collapsed. It was difficult to accept defeat but it was the only direction I seemed to be going.

Three years ago, at the beginning of my third three year term, a group of young people came to join our parish summer camp. The camp was set up for primary school children. These young people however were already in secondary school, but they knew us. When they were in primary school they used to come for our parish "after school programme", a programme that helped the students in the village with their assignments and provided special classes like arts, cooking, English language and the Atayal dialect.

Because the camp was for primary school children and there was no class organized for high school students, a Columban priest, Fr. Andrei Paz from the Philippines, and myself thought that we had to do something for them. We decided to train them as altar servers. For the entire duration of the summer camp Fr. Andrei and I explained to them the parts of the Mass, the importance and functions of an altar server and the proper decorum when serving at Mass.

I taught them the common prayers while Fr. Andrei asked them to memorize the responses at Mass. It was a spontaneous class and they worked diligently for two weeks. During the end of the summer camp we held a children's Mass and on that day they served as altar servers for the first time. Their faces lit up when they processed towards the altar and the faces of the younger kids were in awe seeing their older brother or sister dressed up as altar servers. It was a surreal moment for me to see young people at the altar serving at Mass. Later that year, they were the altar servers when the Bishop presided at the Mass during the parish's golden jubilee celebrations. Their parents and grandparents were very proud of them. They even prepared meals and snacks for the altar servers during practices.

This group of altar servers became the youth group of the parish. To this day, these young people are still serving, and they are not only involved in the parish as altar servers but also help us organize different parish activities. During the summer camp last year they were asked to share on the topic of service for the younger children who were preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation.



*Vida Hequilan (left)*



They shared that they find fulfilment in serving at Mass in the church and that their involvement with the church has led them to have a closer relationship with God and it also helped them face the challenges of high school life. Their presence has encouraged other young people to join the group and it has also been slowly motivating younger children to come to church.

This experience has been one of the highlights of my nine year ministry in this parish in the Taiwanese mountains. It led me to a deeper understanding that things will unfold in God's own time. At the same time it was a humbling experience for me, reminding me that I was so focused on my plans and goals that I forgot that it is only by the grace of God that these plans and goals can come to fruition.

Over my many years of being a Columban Lay Missionary God keeps on giving surprises and creating miracles.

---

*Columban Lay Missionary Vida Hequilan has worked for many years amongst the indigenous peoples of the Taiwanese mountains.*



# Columbans celebrate 50th anniversaries of ordination to priesthood



Photos: Fr Robert Brennan



## Fr Robert Brennan

Since being appointed to Korea from his native New Zealand in 1966, Fr Robert Brennan has spent the last 50 years working in a variety of ministries including parish work, seminary formation, parish Credit Unions, the Catholic Farmer's Association and the Urban Poor Apostolate.

It is in the area of his ministry to the urban poor, however, that Fr. Robert has become internationally known as a social activist, fighting for the rights of the urban poor, dispossessed of their homes by urban redevelopment programmes.

Fr. Robert was ordained priest at St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland, by Archbishop James Liston on July 3, 1965. He is the eldest child of Robert and Sadie Maree Brennan and has two sisters and two brothers.

Fr. Robert studied for the priesthood at St Columban's Seminary, North Turramurra in Sydney.

Fr. Robert's first 12 years of priestly ministry in Korea was spent in the poor coal mining mountainous area of Kang Won Province. In 1980, he moved to Seoul, where he began his particular commitment to the dispossessed urban poor.

On September 4, 2012, Fr. Robert was awarded the City of Seoul's "Grand Prize for Social Welfare" in recognition for his 32 year fight on behalf of the poor families being evicted from their homes by urban redevelopment programmes.

*"The blue-eyed foreigner is a model of selfless dedication and sacrifice on behalf of the poorest members of our city",* said the Mayor of Seoul,

Park Won-soon of Fr. Robert during the award ceremony.

Fr. Robert was granted honorary citizenship of the City of Seoul in recognition for his community services such as financial services, job counselling, housing the homeless and the dispossessed.

He has said, *"I, myself, have been evicted from my house three times and I will go anywhere if someone without a home needs my help."*

Congratulations to Fr. Robert on the 50th anniversary of his ordination to priesthood and his 50 years of serving the people of Korea.

## Fr Paul McGee



AUSTRALIA

*S*ydney'sider Fr. Paul McGee has spent the 50 years of his priesthood working as a Columban missionary in the Philippines, promoting Columban mission back in Australia and with the Chinese Catholic community in Sydney.

Fr. Paul was ordained priest at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, by Cardinal Gilroy on the 17th of July, 1965. He is the son of Vincent and Anne McGee, the fourth of five children in the McGee family.

After ordination, Fr. Paul was assigned to the Philippines. Arriving there in 1966, Fr. Paul was assigned to parish work in the Zambales province. He was parish priest in several parishes in this area.

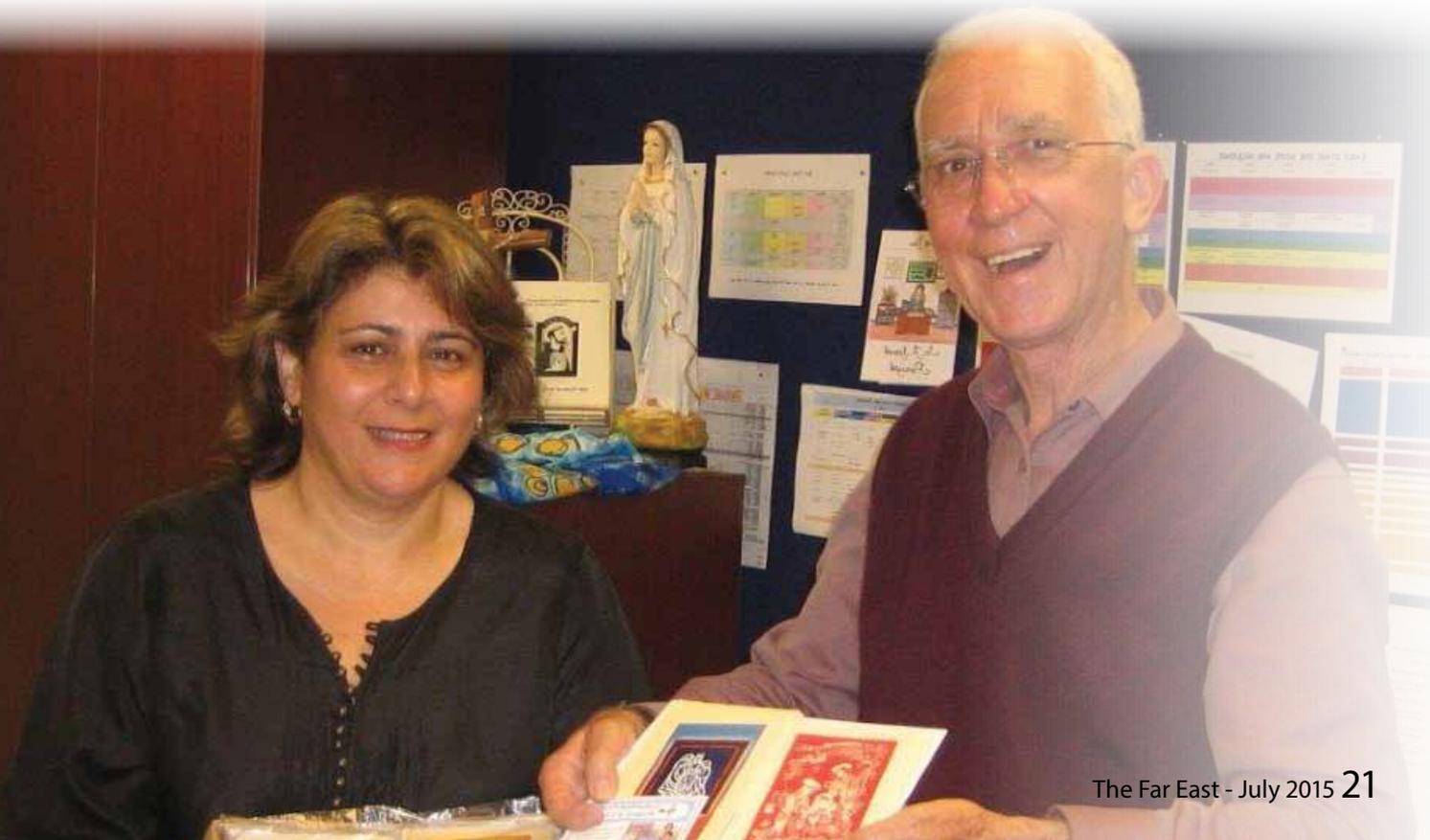
In 1989, Fr. Paul was reassigned to Australia, where he was needed to do Columban promotion throughout central Queensland and in South Australia.

In 1995 he began to dedicate himself to the study of Mandarin so as to be able to work in the Chinese Catholic Apostolate in Sydney. In 1996, as a part of his ministry to the Chinese, Fr. Paul was appointed to the Sacred Heart Parish, Cabramatta, Sydney, and later to St Dominic's, Flemington, also in Sydney.

At the same time, Fr. Paul worked as Chaplain to the Catholic Asian Students Society at Sydney University.

Fr. Paul also is a regular visitor to the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre with the Catholic Pastoral Care Group.

We wish to congratulate Fr. Paul on his 50 years of missionary priesthood.





AUSTRALIA

*#YourWordsHavePower*

*#UseThemWisely*

## They look like long sentences without spaces in between words

I created my first Facebook account at the age of 17. As a student studying HSC English I felt very well acquainted with the English language and its idiosyncrasies. But the use of language online, as I was soon to discover, was another ballgame altogether. High school English had turned me into a master of essays, speeches and reports but online language was another skill to master.

The words we use online are powerful.

In recent years we have seen a great deal of hatred, intolerance and racism conveyed through language online. When we sign up for a social media site or a blogging platform we have an instant public platform to voice our opinions. Anyone can claim to be an expert on anything. Thus, there is great potential for individuals to share misinformed statements and propaganda with thousands and sometimes millions of people. When particular groups are targeted in such events, it exacerbates division and intolerance in society.

It is no wonder social media gets such a bad rap.

In recent months, however, the humble “hashtag” has turned social media into a unifying tool. If you’re new to social media hashtags may seem mystifying.

They look like long sentences without spaces in between words. On Twitter, Instagram and Facebook the hash sign (#) turns any words or group of words that directly follow it into a searchable link.

This allows you to organise content and track discussion topics based on those keywords. So if you wanted to post about World Interfaith Harmony Week you would include: #WorldInterfaithHarmonyWeek in your post. Other people are then able to find your post if they do a search for the hashtag: #WorldInterfaithHarmonyWeek. Likewise, the hashtag allows you to search for other people’s social media posts on the same topic.

The #IllRideWithYou hashtag was inspired by a young Brisbane woman who posted a moving Facebook status about her encounter with a Muslim woman on the day of the siege in Martin Place, Sydney in December, 2014.

*“... and the (presumably) Muslim woman sitting next to me on the train silently removes her hijab,” Ms Jacobs wrote.*

*“I ran after her at the train station. I said ‘put it back on. I’ll walk with u’. She started to cry and hugged me for about a minute - then walked off alone.”.....*

At the time of the Martin Place siege, the hashtag: #IllRideWithYou came into popularity with over 120,000 tweets in one day. The Facebook status quickly circulated on social media and within hours, tens of thousands of social media users were using the hashtag: #IllRideWithYou to offer to ride public transport with Muslims who feel intimidated by anti-Islamic sentiment.

The hashtag is an incredibly powerful tool that offers a channel of mass-expression. The hashtags that go viral provide an indication of values and priorities that we share as a national and international community.

Surprisingly, Australia’s most popular hashtags in 2014 did not touch on themes of hatred, intolerance and racism. On the contrary, many of the hashtags reflected themes of solidarity, human rights and social justice. #BringBackOurGirls - which was used to raise awareness of the 300 girls who were taken from their school dormitory in Nigeria – was another popular hashtag that got the world talking about an event that would have otherwise been ignored by mainstream media.

The way we use language online has the potential to unite or divide. With public platforms of communication at our fingertips, we must be intentional with the words that we use.

---

*Ashleigh Green works in the Columban Mission Institute’s Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.*



# Missionary to the Peruvian Sierra

Columban Fr Gregorio Young-In Kim works in the parish of Yanaoca, in the high mountains and valleys of the Andes Mountains in Peru. His parishioners belong to the indigenous Quechua community.

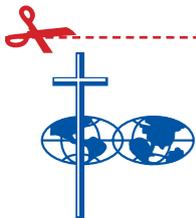
Fr Gregorio is one of several Korean Missionaries working in that area. This means he and the other Koreans have had to learn to speak both Spanish and Quechua.

With your support, Fr Gregorio can continue to work with the indigenous Quechua community.

Your **kindness** and **support** make it possible for Columbans to meet and minister to many people. Your "stringless" gift helps us to respond with flexibility to the most **urgent needs** of people.



Photo: Columbans



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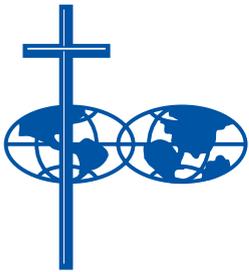
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# Remember the Missions in your WILL

*We cannot take our earthly possessions with us, but we can so dispose of them that our good works will continue after we are gone.*

*A bequest will help Columban missionaries to continue their work with the poor and marginalised and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

*Why not speak to your lawyer about it?*

**FORM OF WILL**

I give devise and bequeath to the Superior for the time being of St Columban's Mission Society (see local address) the sum of \$..... for the use of the said Society.

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