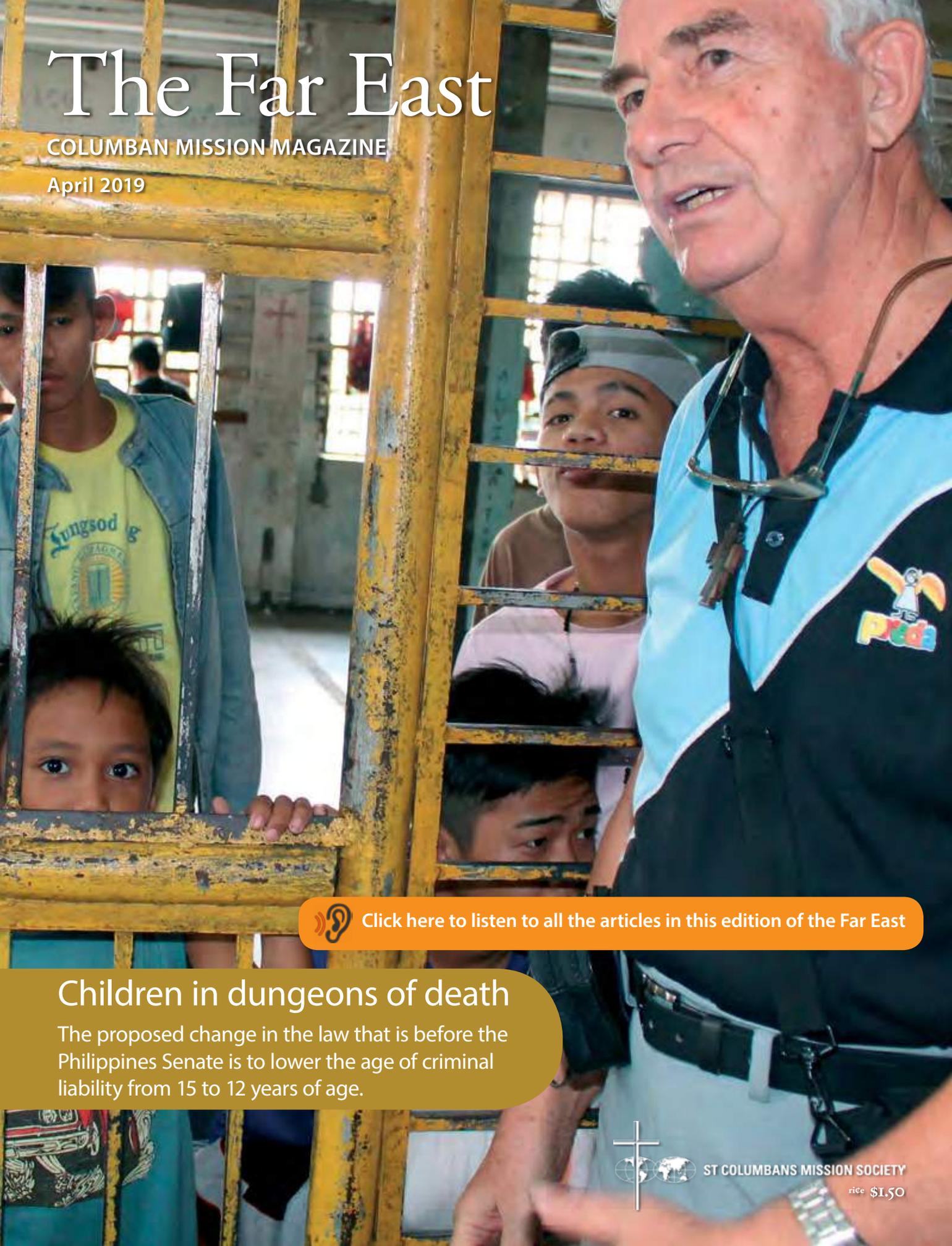


The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

April 2019



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Children in dungeons of death

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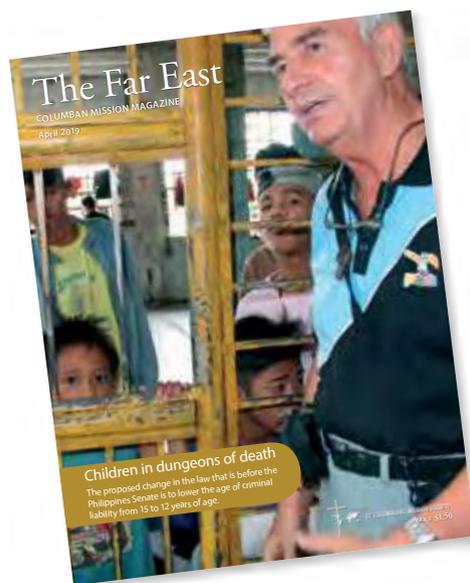
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Children in dungeons of death

Fr Shay Cullen visits young children in jail.

Photo: Missionary Society of St Columban



From the Editor

In this Easter edition of *The Far East* there are several stories that give us an insight into the diverse works of Columban priests, sisters and lay missionaries.

Some of the stories feature sadness, heartbreak and work-place injustices while others highlight the many positive faces of mission.

In 2017 Fr Gary Walker wrote in his Director's column *that Easter teaches us to have hope, to be resilient, to live fully and most of all to have a pure heart.* You can read many fine examples of this message in the following articles.

In Taiwan, Fr Neil Magill spent many years working for better conditions for factory workers and was eventually expelled for his gallant efforts.

The Senate in the Philippines is working to lower the age of criminal liability from 15 to 12 years of age. Fr Shay Cullen regularly visits young children in jail and reports on the appalling conditions.

The Good Friday reflection invites us to stand by the cross of Jesus with his disciples. The author says that, despite the pain of standing by the cross, it can be a powerful place to be.

Fr Dan O'Connor gives us a view of

life in Pakistan among the poor. His background in farming comes in handy when selecting goats and buffaloes to assist struggling families.

As part of a documentary series, *"The Migrant Worker's Face"* a young man tells us about his life in the Philippines before going to Taiwan to work for a better life for himself and his elderly grandmother.

In the Southern Philippines Sr Kathleen Melia's mission is working with the indigenous people who have much to teach us about respecting and living lightly on the earth.

Even though the summit between the US and North Korea did not generate a satisfactory mutual agreement, the South Korean Church hopes for further dialogue towards peace.

In his column, Fr Trevor Trotter writes about the power of the Cross and the message that it brings.

Hope turns to sorrow for a young couple who migrated from Bolivia to Chile with their young son Abigail. In the desert town of Alto Hospicio the family is welcomed by the local church community which becomes an important part of their lives.

Having a relationship with the Christian faith was something that a young Korean Buddhist never imagined would happen. Now working as a lay missionary at a HIV/AIDS Centre, Matilda understands the challenges and prejudices that those suffering from the virus constantly face.

After both graduating as Veterinarians, Kevin and Jo Bell went with their young family to work as lay missionaries in Korea in the 1970s. They have written a book *'Our Korea Connection'* an experience that changed their lives personally, culturally and agriculturally.

As bad news continues to ravage our church and test our faith, it is refreshing to read stories that show the inspirational work of our missionaries.

Let us give thanks with confidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ that brings hope to our lives.

Happy Easter

Janette Mentha
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Workers' champion to educator

Fr Cyril Lovett draws a parallel between the experience of Fr Neil Magill, who, like our patron, St Columban was expelled from his mission country. Twelve years later he was welcomed back.



After his arrest on 17 March 1989 and his expulsion, workers and organisations, such as the New Life Workers Centre which he founded, protested against the authorities' treatment of the Columban missionary.

Fr Neil Magill from Knockloughrim, Co Derry, Ireland was ordained priest in 1973 and spent his first term on mission in Korea. He volunteered to join the first Columban group to Taiwan in 1979. The government's chief concern was economic growth and that was to be reflected in export figures. The workers were seen as mere tools to be used for that national purpose. The Columbans felt distressed when the government began to import and exploit cheap foreign workers from the Philippines and elsewhere. Neil soon realised that the local Church was not involved with social issues or concerned about official Church pronouncements on justice and peace.

Neil believed that the Catholic Social Encyclicals were meant for daily living, and he felt called as a missionary to preach the message of Christianity to factory workers struggling for justice in Taiwan. With his bishop's approval, he rented a small apartment in an industrial estate where he was the only foreigner and priest. He started with nothing and tried to meet workers to

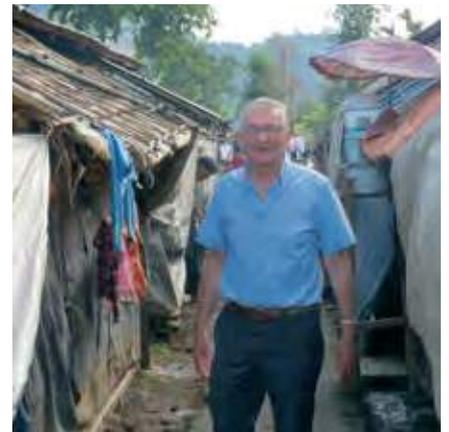
form his first core group. Contact was difficult, but Neil made friends by simply wandering around the industrial estate when the workers were coming out of the factories, or by eating with them at the food stalls on the streets near the factories. Anyone he met he invited to his apartment.

Little by little some workers began to visit him just to chat informally. Later they began to share some of their personal problems and finally to talk about their working conditions. After a year the bishops allowed him to start the New Life Workers' Centre (NLWC); its main purpose was to help workers get to know their rights through educational programmes. For this purpose Neil organised regular seminars and two lawyers offered their services free of charge. In a ten-year period he managed to set up forty non-governmental trade unions.

Harassment and Expulsion

The NLWC was controversial because the government did not want it, and

the Church tried to avoid conflict with the civil authorities. Police began to visit workers' homes to warn parents that their sons and daughters should not attend labour educational courses. Factory bosses threatened to sack any workers who continued to attend the Centre. Neil himself was continually harassed. His mail was stopped, his phone tapped or cut off, and on different occasions police came to tell him that his movements were being carefully monitored.



Fr Neil Magill at the refugee camps, Kachin State, Myanmar.

Photo: Fr Neil Magill SSC

Neil had placed posters on the wall with quotations from Pope John Paul II's Encyclical: *On Human Work*. The police demanded that they be removed as "subversive and leading to communism". For one anxious year he received many anonymous phone calls, often in the middle of the night, telling him to leave Taiwan. On St Patrick's Day 1989, Neil was lured to the local police station on the assurance that his new visa was ready for collection. On arrival there he was grabbed by a number of policemen who rushed him to the airport and bundled him on to a commercial flight for Hong Kong. All he had with him at the time were the clothes he was wearing.

The Church authorities were shocked, angry and embarrassed because they were being publicly attacked by politicians as news of Neil's expulsion was being broadcast all over the world. Two days later, at the first news conference ever held by the Catholic hierarchy in Taiwan, five of the island's bishops defended Neil's apostolate. "Jesus responded to social problems", they said, "and the Church must do what he did". In an open letter 67 eminent scholars claimed that the government had abused its authority. For the first time ever workers demonstrated on the streets against the government.

Meanwhile, Neil was welcomed back to Ireland by his aged parents, and over the following ten years he became the Columban Justice and Peace Coordinator for the Irish Region, the Vice-Director and the Director. Then at the Columban Chapter of the year 2000, he was elected Vicar-General of the Society.

Welcome Back

In the national elections of the year 2000 in Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party took power from the Kuomintang for the first time in 50 years. The new President Chen Shui-bian, a lawyer by profession, who had also been imprisoned by the previous government, talked of his vision for greater democracy and better conditions for workers in Taiwan. He invited Neil to return to Taiwan, paid all his expenses and twice apologised for the treatment Neil had received from the previous government. He also gave Neil \$1,000 spending money while he was in the country. This money Neil donated to voluntary groups working with the poor. The Columban commitment to migrant workers has continued in Taiwan.

Today Fr Magill is in Myanmar and working at the Mandalay Higher Education Centre (HEC) which he founded in 2009. The Centre aims to prepare some of the poorest and brightest Myanmar students by providing high quality tertiary education and to help them achieve their potential and become leaders in both their civil and church communities. In 2018 the Centre had 240 graduates.

Fr Cyril Lovett is the former editor of The Far East in Ireland and resides there.



On his return visit in 2000, at the invitation of the government, Fr Neil was met at the airport by Ms Chen Chu, Minister for Labour, as well as members of her Department, Trade Union leaders, Columbans and friends.



Fr Neil Magill is officially welcomed back to Taiwan by President Chen Shui-bian, who was himself jailed in 1986 for campaigning for greater democracy.



Fr Neil Magill and Taiwan's then Minister for Labour, Ms Chen Chu.



Fr Neil visited areas affected by a massive earthquake in 2000 which left 3,000 Taiwanese dead in its wake and tens of thousands homeless. Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban

Dungeons of death

The proposed change in the law that is before the Philippine Senate is to lower the age of criminal liability from 15 to 12 years of age.

The good news is that the Philippine Senate on February 04 2019, adjourned without a vote to lower the age of children who will be held liable for acts considered criminal in nature from 15 to 12 years of age.

That vote may come the first week of June. The politicians in the lower House of Congress, without serious reflection or listening to expert opinion of doctors and psychologists or having a meaningful debate, decided nine-year-old children could be said to be criminals if they violated laws made for adults.

They did so without caring about the serious ramifications and consequences on the lives of thousands of children

who make childish mistakes or are manipulated by corrupt adults. There was shock and outrage from the public and the NGOs and the International Community. They changed and set criminal liability at 12 years of age and to soften the harsh cruel decision, they called it the age of "social responsibility". The blaming of children for crime is just to cover up the failure of government to rein in the crime syndicates if they are in fact using children to commit crimes. Instead of arresting the ringleaders, they arrest the children whom they ridiculously blame for adult crimes.

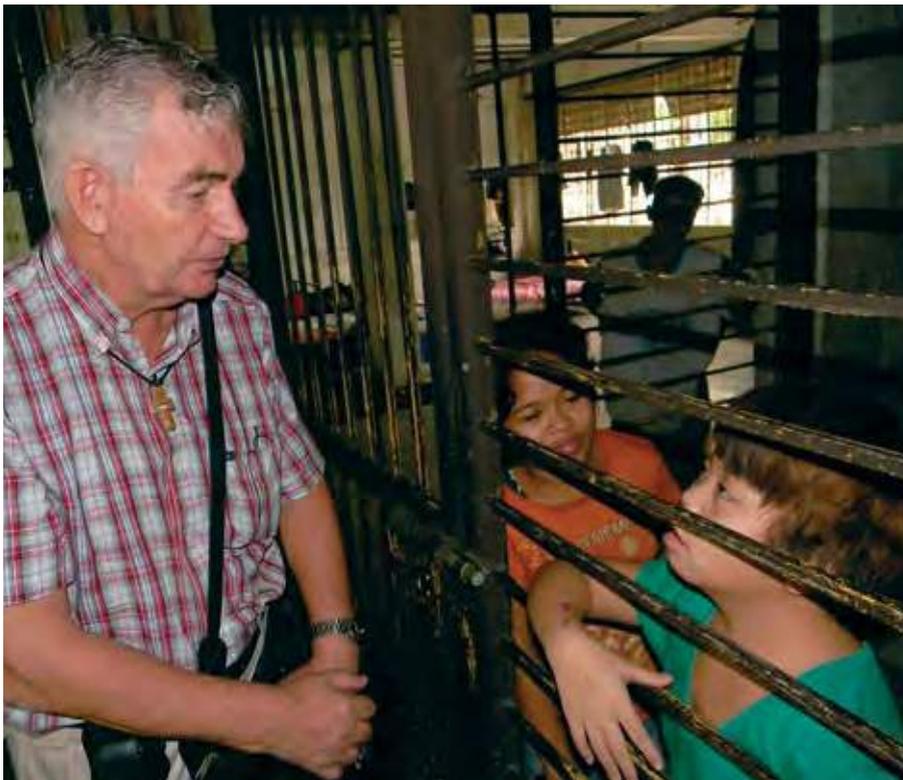
Child psychologists say children of 12 years of age cannot have sufficient rational thought processes and clear knowledge of right and wrong to be

held fully accountable for committing serious crimes.

The proposed change in the law that is before the Philippine Senate is to lower the age of criminal liability from 15 to 12 years of age. Children's rights defenders held a rally outside the Senate gates while members of the **Preda Foundation* went into the chambers of the five senators who are as yet undecided. There, they presented to each office a clear book folder of photographs and two large photos of small children held in jails to the Senator's staff.

These graphic photographs are hard evidence showing that for many years, children as young as ten years of age and some younger and some older have been and are today held as criminals and prisoners inside jails insidiously called *Bahay Pag-asa*, or Houses of Hope. The Senators, or their investigators, have never visited and do not know the abuse and pain-filled days the children suffer in overcrowded jail cells. They suffer 24 hours, 7 days a week, without exercise, social care, education, parent's visits, or entertainment. The Senators are fooling themselves when they say they are beautiful places of reform and education.

They naively believe untruths that these places are lovely youth homes with programs of reform, education, counselling, values formation, and therapy. They are no such thing. The children are incarcerated and abused. Some are jailed for breaking curfew, taking food in the market to survive, living on the streets afraid to go home to a brutal parent, or arrested



Fr Shay Cullen visiting children in jail. Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban



Young children in jail.

for sniffing industrial glue to ease pain. They are accused frequently without evidence but declared guilty by an official and then locked up and confined in jail cells. They sleep on the concrete floor, sit there to eat often bad expired food and endure the awful stink of urine and faeces in blocked toilet holes.

Joshua, a 12-year-old, was a homeless boy afraid to go home to a strict father who beat him and relatives who cursed him when he made any little mistake. He found refuge on the streets with friends who gave him food. He sniffed glue to ease the loneliness and hurt of being rejected by his family.

He was arrested by the Tanod (district guards) and was locked in the Bahay Pag-asa cells like a prisoner. The older inmates bullied him, tied him down, and raped him several times. He was made a slave washing the clothes of the older boys. They threatened him if he complained.

He was given expired canned food and stale rice several times. He slept on the

Many children saved from the hellholes of the bad Bahay Pag-asa tell the same damaging experience of being a prisoner, suffering abuse, rape, beaten up and always hungry.

concrete floor. The cell stank from the blocked toilets. He was made to clean them. He was held for nine months. Many other small boys suffered the same. They were forced to perform sex acts on the old bullies. If they refused, they were beaten and their food taken from them, Joshua said. Then he was transferred to the Preda NGO Home for Boys where he was free and happy and told his story of abuse and suffering.

Many children saved from the hellholes of the bad Bahay Pag-asa tell the same damaging experience of being a prisoner, suffering abuse, rape, beaten up and always hungry.

The Senators think these hellholes will reform children 12 to 15 years old. They are gravely mistaken. These places

dehumanize the innocent children, convince them they are criminals, and prepare them for a future of violence, anger and crime.

These are dungeons of death where the noble Senators will condemn thousands of children today and in the years to come. They will be truly blamed by the Philippine people who are against the lowering of the age and against all such abuse to children especially caused by Senators who should know better.

*Fr Shay Cullen SSC has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1969 and is the founder of *PREDA (People's Recovery, Empowerment Development Assistance Foundation)*
www.preda.org

Standing near the cross

On this sacred day, we listen to the story of the passion of Jesus as told by John the Evangelist.

When you listen to this account, you find it to be simply overwhelming. It is almost too much to take in at once. The passion of Jesus is a gripping drama that reaches down inside of us and evokes our deepest and strongest emotions. It almost defies words of commentary or explanation.

“Each of us has stood near the cross at particular moments in our lives. We know this place well. The situation may have involved the serious illness or loss of a family member, grappling with a broken relationship, experiencing a terrible disappointment, facing a disability, ... or a thousand other things.”

Each of us has stood near the cross at particular moments in our lives. We know this place well. The situation may have involved the serious illness or loss of a family member, grappling with a broken relationship, experiencing a terrible disappointment, facing a disability, a communal riot, unjust persecution, brutal lynching and murder of the 'other' or a thousand other things. Whatever the situation, we know that **standing near the cross** is indeed a painful place to be. The Gospels do not suppress or gloss over the pain of the cross. In an era in which talk about a Messiah who had been crucified sounded ludicrous to many people, the Christian Scriptures presented the death of Jesus directly and vividly. For Christians, keeping the memory of Jesus' death is a living reminder that we are never alone as we stand near the cross in our own lives. While our faith does not magically remove the pain of that place, you and I are assured that

Jesus, the crucified Son of God, is in solidarity with us at that place. He is intimately close to us because he has experienced that place in the most personal and intense way possible.

Standing near the cross of Jesus is also, however, a powerful place to be. It is powerful not because God finds any joy in human suffering. It was human beings, not God the Father, who put Jesus on the cross. Christianity is not a cult of suffering. **Standing near the cross** of Jesus is a powerful place to be because it is the place where the power of God is present and at work – quietly, faithfully, patiently at work from within. At his own moment of death, Jesus held on to the hand of his Abba God, and, even in this hour of darkness, experienced communion with this tenaciously faithful God. And God was present and on the move to bring life out of death. The flow of blood and water from the pierced side

of Christ is a sign of that new life that will become manifest in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

For us, too, despite its pain, **standing near the cross** can be a powerful place to be. It is, in our context of unjust treatment, accusation, harassment, violence, legal hurdles, hatred and hate violence, killing and ethnic cleansing...

Standing near the cross of Jesus is a painful and a powerful place to be. As we pray this Good Friday, we are invited to stand there with Jesus and his disciples. And we are called to trust that what is happening there is what happens wherever the God of Jesus Christ is present: God is faithfully present and at work to bring life out of death. We believe that this, in fact, is what God does for a living.

Jesuit Conference of South Asia
www.jcsaweb.org
Jcsawm



Mary at the foot of the cross – Sculpture, St Isidore Farm, Korea. Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban



Through the lens of a missionary

Buffalo and Calf. Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban

In Fr Dan O'Connor's 2018 Christmas letter, he gives us an insight into some of the activities that occur in a year.

Over the past year there has been much Good News of Great Joy with experiences of God's love, healing, mercy, joy, justice and peace. Sadly, there have also been many tragic events which are not God's will.

Illness and a donkey cart

A young Hindu woman named Hava had sadly been diagnosed with cancer in her leg. It had to be amputated. She wears rosary beads (which a Sister who one could say is another Mother Teresa gave her). Hava has a deep inner strength and although illiterate possesses plenty of *get up and go* with a captivating smile which is a tonic to those who have journeyed with her. Her father is very poor and ekes out a living with a donkey cart that I was able to help in its purchase. Hava's husband, because of her health condition, fled and left her.

Muslims and Mother Mary

We again hosted an Iftar meal for some Muslims during their month of the Ramadan fast. They appreciate this reaching out to them and it builds up good relationships. Before the meal they like to visit the church and take photos of themselves with the statue of Mother Mary.

The brawl in the cemetery

We have a family living in the cemetery referred to as a *'quiet place'*. Some poor people known to them also came to squat there. Some other people nearby did not take kindly to them and a brawl broke out. On hearing this we rushed to the scene. Some of them had injuries requiring medical attention. The police



Collecting annual rice contribution to the Church.

got involved. One of our party was locked up. The next day we managed to get him released though we had to pay some money to the police where he was held. A man with influence brokered a truce among the parties and peace has prevailed.

An ambulance, goats and buffalos

The parish of Stella Maris in Christchurch, New Zealand, made a very generous donation to purchase milking goats. A group of us went to an animal sale where several thousand people were present. We purchased 11 milking goats with two kids at heel. These we piled into our ambulance and then delivered to poor widows and a few other poor and needy people. They were all so delighted and thankful. Now they would have milk, without added water, for themselves and family.

A virus has hit resulting in the death of buffaloes and goats. A few of our goats died. One family, seeing that their goat was sick, managed to sell it to a butcher before it died. A few days ago I visited a place where we gave a goat to a poor widow. Recently it delivered two healthy kids. The buffalo that I had to purchase last year, after running into it with the jeep, has produced a very healthy calf to the joy of the people in a village who care for it. The calf is a good size now. Its mother is still giving pure milk and is 'in calf' again.

Footy tournament and thorn bushes

During 2018 we Columbans have been celebrating our Centenary Year. Among events here in Badin we sponsored a football tournament. Not a blade of grass on the field, with one side lined with solid thorn bushes, and so the linesmen had to be extra alert so that the ball did not become punctured. A grand day was held by all. We could not allow any Muslims to take part for fear of someone getting "high blood



Goat transported by the ambulance to the widow.

pressure" from an altercation. This could develop into a dangerous situation which could develop into a misuse of the blasphemy law.

Holiday in New Zealand

This year was my turn to have holidays home in New Zealand. After a long fierce dry summer it was such a relief to board a cool plane with meals and beer available for the flight "down under".

On my way home I dropped into Sydney and caught the Columban Centenary celebration there. It was very special meeting up with friends some of whom I had not seen for 30 years. The celebration in New Zealand was also a wonderful event.

Politics

This year former cricket captain Imran Khan was elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan. He is the leader of the "Movement for Justice Party". He is endeavouring to hit some sixes and bowl out corruption, yet it is a struggle!

Delhi Belly

Some families have fled from the feudal system and are squatting with many other families on land at the edge of Hyderabad City. A few times I have visited them with catechist Lal. The living conditions are very basic indeed.

Last week before arriving I had a good solid meal in the bazaar. The previous time I ate what the people gave me but the few days following I had the Delhi Belly real bad.

Annual retreat

We had our annual retreat at the Monastery in Karachi. These enclosed Sisters have high walls around them. During our retreat, about a mile away a bomb exploded where poor people were selling and buying clothes on the side of the road. Some people lost their lives. It was a very sad scene when I visited, with clothes and victims' footwear scattered around.

For Christmas there will be three Columban priests in Badin. A priest in a large parish about eight hours travel north of here has invited me to help him out with Christmas Masses in different places.

On the evening of Boxing Day eight Columbans will gather here in Badin for a Christmas celebration together.

May we sing God's love song all the days of 2019.

Thanks for all your generous support in various ways helping mission here in this part of God's vineyard.

Columban Fr Daniel O'Connor from New Zealand has worked in Pakistan for over 30 years.

The migrant worker's face

Gervae Acosta is a migrant worker in Taiwan. He told his story for “The Migrant Worker’s Face,” a documentary series published by the Hope Workers’ Centre.

Gervae began his story with – *“There’s a reunion video on Facebook between a Filipino man and his biological parents that makes me cry every time”.*

The video depicts a true story, re-enacted to dramatize the narrative. It begins with a young boy, Jojo, running frantically among vendors’ wares in Muñoz Street Market, in Quezon City. The four-year-old boy has just escaped from his burning home and can’t locate his parents. He doesn’t know if they’ve survived or, if they have survived, how to find them now. He runs through the market, hoping but failing to catch a glimpse of his guardians.

A jeepney driver realizes the boy’s plight and takes him to an orphanage that quickly take him in. Eventually he is adopted by a family who take him to live with them in Australia. The new family of three grow with more children and Jojo’s new parents work hard to raise all of them well.

Jojo becomes a film producer, successful by most standards, yet he feels incomplete because he knows nothing about the fate of his parents. 30 years later he returns to Quezon City in the Philippines in search of them. He

hands out flyers with his baby photo, hoping someone will recognize the story of the missing Filipino boy.

A couple who lost their son 30 years before come forward but DNA tests reveal a 0% match.

Jojo’s story is picked up by a television station and more parents come forward but DNA tests again reveal 0% match.

Finally, friends of Jojo’s parents recognise the story and come forward with the names of his parents who have split up. Without too much difficulty, Jojo manages to find his father, now an engineer in the U.S. The reunited father and son speak tearfully via Skype. Jojo’s mother proves more difficult to find and, as Jojo nears the date of his return to Australia, it seems unlikely he will locate her.

A day before he is set to leave, however, a radio station locates his mother for an interview. She recognizes Jojo’s photo and chokes back tears to say she wants to meet him. In an emotional, final scene, one happy Filipina comes forward and hugs her son. DNA confirms: Jojo has found his mom. As mother and son are reunited on screen, my tears join theirs.

I was born on October 4, 1987, to a broken family.

My name tells some of the story of my family’s history – **Gervae Jhon Diamola Acosta.**

Gervae Jhon is a mixture of biblical names chosen by my mother.

Diamola is my mother’s maiden name, revived only when her marriage ended.

Acosta is all I have by which to remember my father.

By the time I was born, my father, Gervacio Trinidad Acosta, and my mother had split up. My mother kicked him out of the house after he brutally beat her while she was pregnant with me.

For the first two years of my life, my sister and I were raised by my mother in Negros Oriental in the Philippines. My mother worked hard to love us and protect us from our family’s history.

When my mother re-married, she went to live with her husband some hours away from Quezon City. My sister and I stayed with my grandparents in Negros Oriental as my mother thought it best for us not to be uprooted. My grandparents gave her their blessing and promised to look after us.

Fast forward: Manila

I worked for eight years in an electronics factory in Manila but as hard as I worked, I knew I would never earn

I worked for eight years in an electronics factory in Manila but as hard as I worked, I knew I would never earn enough to support my grandmother... who had given up so much for my sister and I. So, I began to make plans to move to another country.

enough to support my grandmother who had given up so much for my sister and I. (My grandfather had passed away). So, I began to make plans to move to another country.

Taiwan

I found a broker who secured a position for me with Hitachi in Taoyuan County. After paying the fee and purchasing a one-way ticket to Taiwan I was on my way.

I see my work in Taiwan as a sacrifice in-line with the sacrifice my grandparents made for us.

Most months at Hitachi, I earn about \$1,130 of which I give \$260 to my grandmother. The rest of my salary is split between \$450 savings for my future family and living expenses.

The Hope Workers Centre

Although my job was rewarding I was looking to do more with my life than just work so I began attending the Hope Worker's Centre where I have made friends and eventually became a volunteer as an usher and part of the Lectors and Commentators Programs.

At the Center I began to talk to Mhike, the Director about my family and the dad-sized hole in my memory. I told him how badly I wanted to see my father and Mhike asked, "Why do you want to see him?"

I said, "I want to see him because I think I might learn more about myself. I am certain that I have characteristics passed on from him. For so long I have lived without knowing fully who I am or where I came from."

Mhike helped me to look

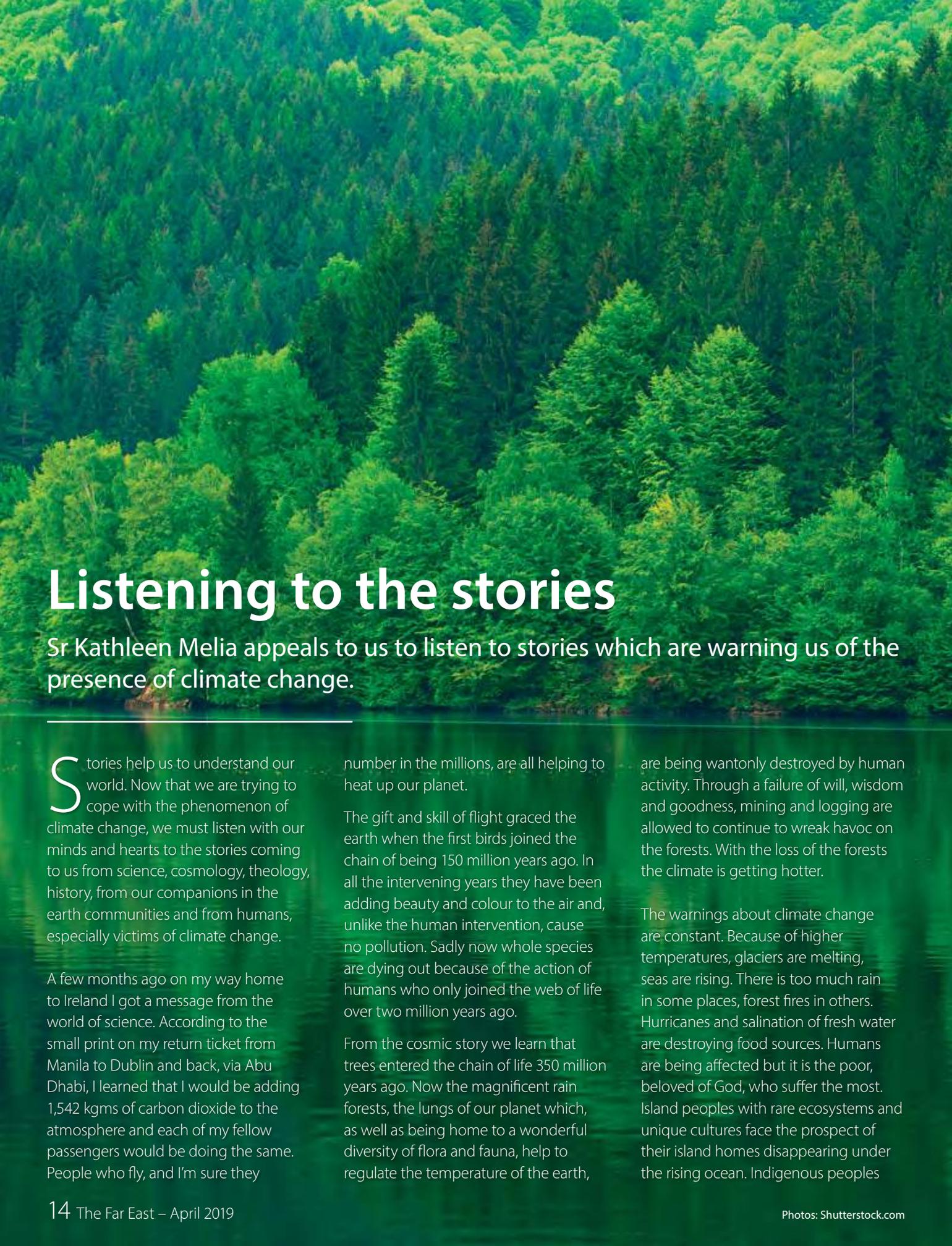
for my father but as yet I have not been able to track him down. I pray that if and when I do meet him, he will recognise me and it will be like the reunion in the video when Jojo finally found his mother.

Edited by Hannes Zetzsche who was a Columban volunteer for the international program in Taiwan in 2017.



Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban





Listening to the stories

Sr Kathleen Melia appeals to us to listen to stories which are warning us of the presence of climate change.

Stories help us to understand our world. Now that we are trying to cope with the phenomenon of climate change, we must listen with our minds and hearts to the stories coming to us from science, cosmology, theology, history, from our companions in the earth communities and from humans, especially victims of climate change.

A few months ago on my way home to Ireland I got a message from the world of science. According to the small print on my return ticket from Manila to Dublin and back, via Abu Dhabi, I learned that I would be adding 1,542 kgms of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and each of my fellow passengers would be doing the same. People who fly, and I'm sure they

number in the millions, are all helping to heat up our planet.

The gift and skill of flight graced the earth when the first birds joined the chain of being 150 million years ago. In all the intervening years they have been adding beauty and colour to the air and, unlike the human intervention, cause no pollution. Sadly now whole species are dying out because of the action of humans who only joined the web of life over two million years ago.

From the cosmic story we learn that trees entered the chain of life 350 million years ago. Now the magnificent rain forests, the lungs of our planet which, as well as being home to a wonderful diversity of flora and fauna, help to regulate the temperature of the earth,

are being wantonly destroyed by human activity. Through a failure of will, wisdom and goodness, mining and logging are allowed to continue to wreak havoc on the forests. With the loss of the forests the climate is getting hotter.

The warnings about climate change are constant. Because of higher temperatures, glaciers are melting, seas are rising. There is too much rain in some places, forest fires in others. Hurricanes and salination of fresh water are destroying food sources. Humans are being affected but it is the poor, beloved of God, who suffer the most. Island peoples with rare ecosystems and unique cultures face the prospect of their island homes disappearing under the rising ocean. Indigenous peoples

who were an integral part of the forest community and who through their life and their rituals honoured the spirit, source of all life, are being brutally cut off from the homes of their ancestors.

An estimated one billion people live in the slums of cities, driven there by poverty caused by unjust and uncaring economic systems and forced to live on land which will be affected by rising seas. They are always the first victims of massive hurricanes which are occurring with such regularity in so many countries that we very soon forget the names of the affected places and the stories of the victims and move on with our lives. Many of the victims are unmourned as whole families and communities have been annihilated. Climate change brought about by humans is not the only cause of the destructive hurricanes. Where are the mangroves that once protected our coastlines, the forests which prevented severe flooding and landslides, native trees with deep roots which can withstand the strength of the hurricanes?

Our earth, wonderful and precious, brought into and kept in being by the Spirit of infinite love, is being threatened by humans, the last-born in the community of life. All the species that preceded us prepared for us a paradise. And now we are destroying our common home.

At this critical stage we must, as Pope Francis encourages us, make room in our hearts for the wonderful generosity of our Creator God. The Scripture invites us to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God. We must get down from our pedestals and cherish all creatures as Pope Francis asks us, and learn from the poor. As part of the problem, we must become part of the solution. All of us whether individuals, families, religious, social or political communities, professions and associations can contribute to healing the planet.

Jesus came among us loving creation, bringing good news to the poor and through his death and resurrection offered us a future full of hope.

Our mission too is to spread goodness, and indeed goodness is everywhere. I have experienced it here in the Philippines in indigenous people who risk their lives to protect their ancestral lands, in the poor living so lightly and joyfully on the earth, and in the children who praise and spread joy and wonder. I have experienced wonderful goodness and generosity in Ireland also. It is because of the goodness and generosity of schoolchildren and parishioners, family and friends, sisters and priests that our mission in Midsalip in the southern Philippines is enabled to continue to care for creation and to walk with the poor as they seek a better life.

Before leaving for Ireland I had asked the pupils in our pre-schools in Midsalip to bring five fruit-tree or forest-tree seeds to school and, with the help of their parents and under the guidance of the teachers and staff, to plant the seeds in the soil. I asked them, when the seeds germinated, to transfer them to bags which the children themselves filled with soil. So when I arrived back in the Philippines, I learned that more than a thousand little seedlings were growing in the bags. The children are delighted to be assisting in the miracle of new growth. There were a few losses as the Subanen chickens foraged for their own food and were delighted to discover fat, juicy avocado and durian seeds in the soil. And God who delights in the soil, the seeds and the air, the sun and the children was surely delighted that some scrawny chickens could feast on the seeds.

Sr Kathleen Melia from Mohill, Co Leitrim Ireland joined the Columban Sisters in 1967. Since 1983, she has been in Midsalip where her wide ranging ministry to the Subanen people includes education, healthcare, farming programmes and the study and preservation of their culture.



A young girl watches a plane as it passes over an apartment block in Hong Kong.

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.

Mission Intentions for April

Doctors and their Collaborators in War Zones

For doctors and their humanitarian collaborators in war zones, who risk their lives to save the lives of others.



The Korean Church:

“Resume dialogue with the North as soon as possible”

“Even if the summit between the US and North Korea did not generate a satisfactory mutual agreement, we hope that the dialogues between South Korea, North Korea and the United States will resume as soon as possible, so that the path towards peace on the Korean peninsula continues” said Fr Matthias Young-Yup Hur, spokesperson of the Archdiocese of Seoul and Director of the Office for Social Communications in the diocese of the South Korean capital.

Fr Young-Yup Hur recalled the words of Cardinal Andrew Yeom, Soo-jung, Archbishop of Seoul and Apostolic Administrator in the Diocese of Pyongyang, in his homily during the recent Mass to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Movement of Independence on March 01: *“Peace is the most important and delicate thing that we Korean people should establish on the Korean peninsula today. However, to truly improve relations between the South and the North and bring about genuine reconciliation of the Korean population, we should first of all achieve social integration. That is, our people must be reconciled and united first of all in our minds.”* Fr Young-Yup Hur confirmed that *“the Korean Church will work to bring peace and reconciliation to the Korean people, praying for the special intercession of Our Lady of Peace, Patroness of the Diocese of Pyongyang”*.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in expressed the belief that the United States and North Korea will end up



President Donald J. Trump is greeted by Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Wednesday, Feb. 27, 2019, at the Sofitel Legend Metropole hotel in Hanoi, for their second summit meeting. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead). Credit Commons: Wikimedia

agreeing on denuclearization, despite the failure of the summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un, who met in Vietnam in February, 2019.

“The second North Korean-US summit, although disappointing in its outcome, was an opportunity to confirm the significant progress made through the dialogue between the two countries”, said President Moon, urging the parties *“to work for a rapid resumption*

of dialogue because we do not want the deadlock to prolong”.

As a sign of easing of tensions, the United States and South Korea cancelled important military exercises in March in order to *“support diplomatic efforts”* with North Korea. These joint exercises have long been a source of bilateral tension in the Korean peninsula.

Seoul Agenzia Fides

From the Director

The sign of the Cross

The Sign of the Cross is probably the first prayer that we were ever taught. Our parents helped us to make the right gesture and to say the right words.

Just this month the Columban website has a great video that shows children how to make the Sign of the Cross.

It is made up of two parts. The gesture and the words. It is a very basic prayer in the best sense of the word. It engages our body by requiring that we use the right movements. It also demands that we get our head and our tongues around the right words.



It is also made up of two parts in the sense that this simple prayer points to the two biggest mysteries of our faith. The gesture reminds us of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the words remind us of our belief in the Three-in-One God.

While children can learn how to make the Sign of the Cross it is as adults that we absorb more of the meaning of the Prayer as we contemplate the mysteries associated with it.

The wonder of this prayer is that the gesture and the words invite us to see how God is involved in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Why was Jesus killed? It was because of people being jealous; people hanging on to power; people telling lies; fear and all the same sorts of reasons that people are killed today. He was smart enough to see what was likely to happen to him, so what did he do? The Three-in-One God had seen that the people they had created out of love had gone astray in many ways. Fortunately "God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son." (Jn 3:16). So Jesus' response to the life-threatening situation that was building up around him in those final weeks was to continue to reach out in love. Like a parent who continues to love the child or the teenager who is going astray, Jesus did not harden his heart. Even on the Cross he said "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing".

We all know the next wonderful step. Three days later Jesus is risen from the dead. The power of the love of God had overcome death and let loose the power of the Resurrection for all humankind. The Sign of the Cross, this simple gesture

So Jesus' response to the life-threatening situation that was building up around him in those final weeks was to continue to reach out in love. Like a parent who continues to love the child or the teenager who is going astray, Jesus did not harden his heart.

and prayer, invites us to see how this cosmic struggle of good and evil has been played out and is being played out today.

When we see the terrible consequences of war and violence today, how do we respond? It is deeply disturbing. We feel anger. We may want revenge. We cry out for justice and feel compassionate towards all the victims that we see suffering on our TV screens. Maybe we ask, "Where is God in all this?" As Pope Francis said recently, "Our God has feelings too." What does God feel when these things are happening in our world? A key saying of Jesus is "Whatever you do to the least of my children that you do unto me" (Mt 25:40). So in the child suffering in Yemen we can see the suffering Jesus. In the victims of domestic violence we can see the suffering Jesus.

For some people they will not see Jesus. All that they can see is the pain or maybe even an enemy. However, as we contemplate the Sign of the Cross we can start to become more aware of the truth of God's presence in our world. We start to see that our God is suffering with those who are suffering. Through the power of that same love, that brought Jesus to new life, we are all being healed and transformed. We do not reach this level of awareness easily or quickly, but this short prayer always points us in the right direction.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Trevor J. Trotter".

Fr Trevor Trotter
director@columban.org.au



Looking for a better life

An interview with Bolivian migrant Patricia Rodriguez

By Columban Lay Missionary, Oisín Kenny

Sitting down with Patricia Rodriguez in a noisy *comedor* bustling with activity, boisterous children, cats and dogs, she agreed to tell me about her life and experience since arriving in Chile. I translated her words from Spanish to English. A migrant from Bolivia, she arrived in 2009 with her husband Rolando and baby Abigail. Now they have two children, Abigail aged 11 and Rafael aged two. Originating from Cochabamba, a city nestled in an Andean valley in central Bolivia, she left behind six sisters and a large extended family. Baby Rafael was born with a severe medical condition known as TRISOMY 3, a rare chromosomal disorder, just one of his many difficulties. Rafael's biggest battle is with breathing. Often, I hear him struggling to breathe while lying in his pram. The other children

scamper around him, oblivious to his trials but his big sister, Abigail, jumps to his aid attentively.

Patricia came to Chile looking for a better life explaining that "life for women can be very difficult where I come from. They have to work long hours for low wages and frequently encounter discrimination."

Now she lives in Alto Hospicio, a mining town in the Atacama Desert, Chile. I first met Patricia nearly three years ago in 'El Comedor Solidario, Fe y Esperanza' in the shantytown beside where I live. In Chile a shantytown is known as a *toma*.

Based in the Columban parish of *Sagrada Corazón*, the *comedor*

provides practical help in terms of assisting the nutritional needs of the residents, particularly the children, but also in community development, training courses for women and a meeting place for pastoral engagement. The *comedor* is very much in the heart of the community based in the reality of the living conditions of the locals. Although we do our best to maintain it in decent condition, it is still rough, dusty and dirty, a cramped space for a sink and gas stove, surrounded by high galvanised and plywood walls. Soon we hope to move to a recently built hall behind the parish church. Nevertheless, the women cook up a wholesome meal with food donations and they can feed up to 60 children and 20 adults.

As a coordinator in the *comedor* I have watched Patricia become increasingly involved in its activities and take more of a leadership role. Her mother Filipa also helps. Patricia began attending around the same time as myself nearly three years ago and is now a regular cook in the kitchen and participates in short courses for the women. According to Patricia, “the *comedor* has been very important in helping to feed my family, especially when my husband cannot find work. We also get other help in terms of clothes and necessities. It is a good place to meet people and catch up with friends.”

Patricia’s home in the *toma* is like the others. It is surrounded by thick, high plywood walls. Inside is a dusty space, a few metres square, surrounded by make-shift rooms also built with sheets of timber. There are no windows and the entrance is securely bolted. Security is always an issue here. Asked about life in the *toma* she says it has both good and bad aspects. “I have nice neighbours and we help each other out. Also, it is our own place, for my own family, which I did not have in Bolivia. I bought this plot from the previous owner.” Plots may exchange hands with frequency in the *toma* as people come and go. “On the other hand, it can be difficult and dangerous here,” she continues. “Sometimes they cut off the light or water for up to a month. Without light I am afraid of fires because we have to use candles.”

Fires can spread with devastating speed due to all the timber construction materials and houses squeezed on top of one another. “Crime is a big problem here as well and every night there are drug dealers on the streets. They can be as young as 13-years-old. Sometimes there are gunshots and we must hide in our bedroom. The bullets can come through the walls. Unfortunately, it is illegal to build stronger, permanent houses in the *toma*.”

“What I want is an operation for my baby Rafael,” she states emphatically. “He is on a waiting list, but they say it will be two or three more years. I would also love my own place, a permanent one like a house or apartment.”

“And what are your hopes for the future?” I ask. “What I want is an operation for my baby Rafael,” she states emphatically. “He is on a waiting list, but they say it will be two or three more years. I would also love my own place, a permanent one like a house or apartment.” It seems that Patricia won’t be returning to Bolivia any time soon, especially with Rafael’s condition.

Patricia attends the local parish church and I ask her what her faith means to her. “My faith is everything to me,” she replies. “It is my strength and my fortress. It helps me especially when I am overwhelmed with problems. As it says in the Bible, “*Knock and the door will be opened to you.*”

“There are problems everywhere in the world, but life is beautiful. You

only get one life and it is important to use it well. Every day I wake up and thank God for my children and the life we have. God has brought me to Chile and I believe has a purpose for me.” Perhaps it is all the help you are giving in the *comedor*, I suggest. A mischievous smile breaks across Patricia’s face. “Perhaps,” she laughs and goes off to help in the kitchen amidst all the noise and bustle.

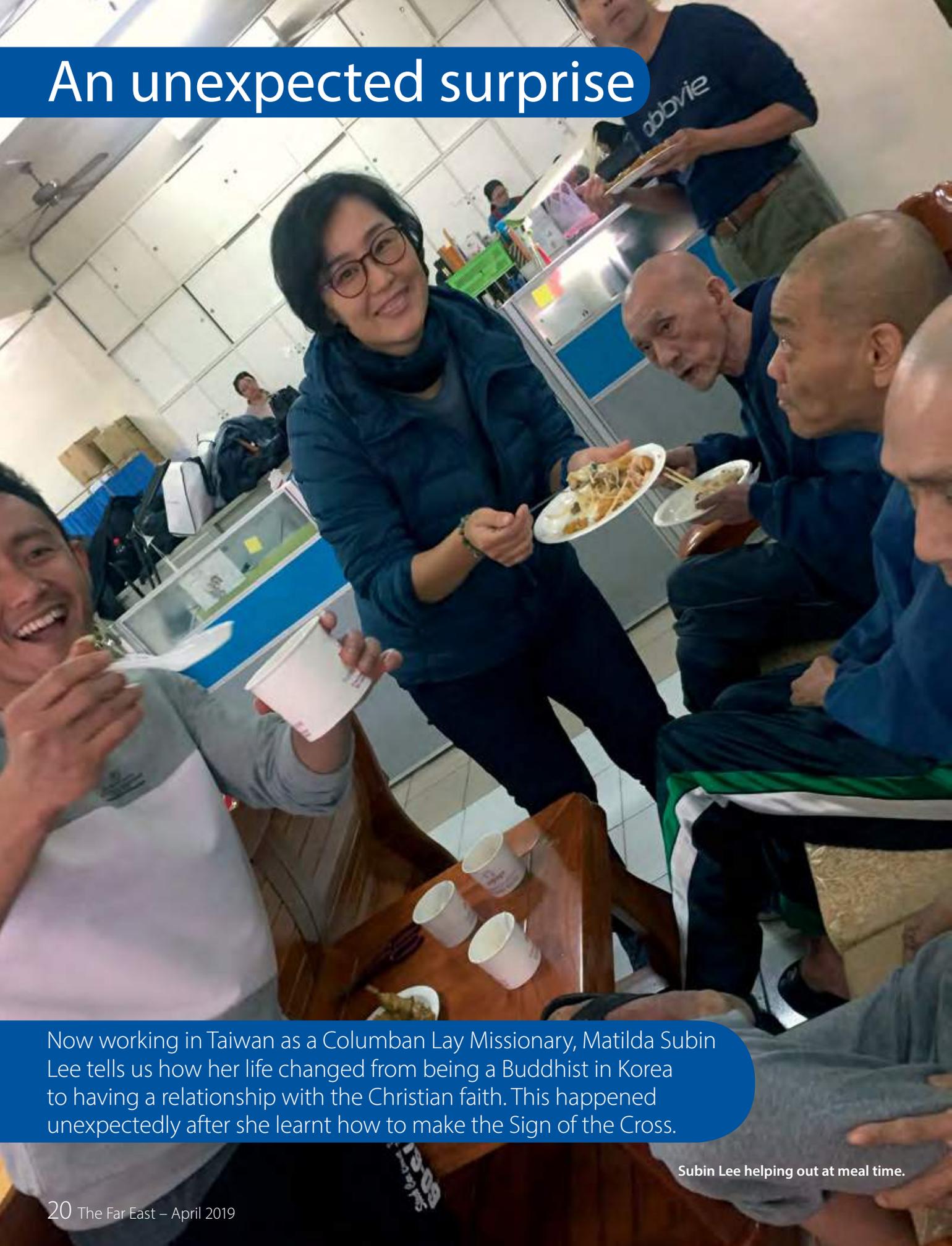
Oisín Kenny is a Columban lay missionary in Chile.

Editor’s Note: We are sad to report that Rafael passed away in 2018 due to complications from Trisomy 3. Patricia has graciously allowed us to publish her story following her son’s death. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Patricia and her family.



Oisín, Abigail, Filipa, Patricia and Rolando outside the parish church, Alto Hospicio. Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban

An unexpected surprise



Now working in Taiwan as a Columban Lay Missionary, Matilda Subin Lee tells us how her life changed from being a Buddhist in Korea to having a relationship with the Christian faith. This happened unexpectedly after she learnt how to make the Sign of the Cross.

Subin Lee helping out at meal time.

Subin Lee had little understanding of Catholicism but decided to accept an invitation from a nun to visit the local church. It was there she was taught how to make the Sign of the Cross even though she didn't fully understand what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit meant. Amazingly it was there that she began an unexpected relationship with the God of Jesus Christ.

Subin Lee wanted to learn more about God and the mission of Jesus. After listening to another nun speaking about her missionary life, she began to explore what mission really meant. She came across Columban Lay Missionaries while surfing the internet and over the next three years Subin Lee attended information days with the Columbans in Seoul.

After a long journey of five years, Subin is now a Columban lay missionary working in Taiwan. Whilst there has been many challenges with living away from home, understanding a new culture and learning a new language, she has no regrets.

When my friends ask, "What are you doing in Taiwan?" I tell them that I work with patients in a HIV/AIDS Centre. They find it difficult to understand why I would work with people that I have nothing in common with. I used to feel that way myself, but after spending three months in the Centre, visiting and sharing meals with the residents, my prejudices and preconceptions were challenged and shattered. I am now more understanding of the stigma and discrimination that those suffering from HIV/AIDS are confronted with.

There are 48 residents in the Centre which offers full accommodation and meals. Most of them suffer from a range of physical and mental disabilities. They generally don't like to talk about themselves and are

especially reluctant to talk about their families who do not want to live with them or even visit them for fear of being shunned by society.

Although I do not see my family often I am fortunate that they keep in touch with me and offer their encouragement and support of my work as a lay missionary. I realise how lucky I am to have this support and try to understand how painful it must be for the residents who do not have the love and support of their families.

I pray that society will eventually see the 'humanity' of those living with HIV/AIDS and not just the disease.

I would like to say thank you to Columban benefactors for their care of those who are sick and alone.

Matilda Subin Lee is a Columban lay missionary in Taiwan.

They find it difficult to understand why I would work with people that I have nothing in common with. I used to feel that way myself, but after spending three months in the Centre, visiting and sharing meals with the residents, my prejudices and preconceptions were challenged and shattered.



Activities with the residents.

Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban

Our Korea Connection

Jo and Kevin Bell were a couple of young veterinary students at Melbourne University in the 1960's. Jo tells the story of what led them to Korea as Columban lay missionaries.

After graduation we married and began work as vets in Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. We had a couple of little boys and our lives were pretty easy.

We started to think that we would like to work in a third world country, where life was not so easy for the local people.

We did a training course for Lay Missionary work with PALMS who

provide long-term international volunteering opportunities to skilled volunteers.

Around this time there was a Columban priest doing a supply at our church in Bacchus Marsh. We invited him for dinner and he brought along Columban Fr Paul Carey, who was just back from Korea.

Fr Paul mentioned that *Fr. PJ McGlinchey was flying to Sydney

that week to buy some cattle for his agricultural project on Jeju Island in Korea and that he might be able to use a couple of young vets.

A meeting was set up for us to meet Fr PJ (as he was known) and as they say the rest is history. We spent five years working with the Columbans in Korea and our association with Korea continues today.



After finding letters I had written to my parents from Korea in the 1970s, I wanted to document our experience as lay missionaries. Last year 'Our Korea Connection' was published.

Being Columban lay missionaries in Korea changed our lives personally, culturally and agriculturally.

The experience made us realise that when you give your life to God, it will take you in amazing directions.

**Fr McGlinchey's model of development and profitable farming encouraged the use of underused farm land and new farming methods. He established St Isidore Farm which raised pigs, sheep, cows and horses at its stud.*



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