

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



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THE FAR EAST

Published seven times yearly by the Missionary Society of St Columban (Maynooth Mission to China).

THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

To promote an awareness of the missionary dimension of the Church among readers; to report on the work of Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries; and to seek spiritual and material support for missionaries.

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Subscription

£5 a year. Cheques/postal orders to be made payable to: "The Columban Fathers".

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Front Cover

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At Christmastime we are drawn to reflect on our place of belonging, our 'home'. This sense of being drawn to home may be part of our nature, our cultural heritage and also part of our love for and fascination with the Nativity. As we approach the festival of Christmas this year let us reflect on the awful reality of so many men, women and children in our country who are without a home.

In the second chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke we read the story of how Jesus came to be born. In Luke, we are told that Joseph and Mary were away from their home because of the census and found themselves without a place to stay. This must have meant extra hardship for them and especially Mary as she went into labour and delivered her baby in unusual circumstances.

In Matthew, we read of the threat to the life of the child Jesus and of the family's flight into Egypt. Two thousand years later this kind of threat goes on every day as huge numbers of people flee the horror of war, violence, extreme poverty, corruption, death threats and now climate change which destroys land and crops.

Daisy (not her real name) is a Nigerian woman who is seeking asylum here in Ireland. Her reasons for leaving home are due to violence which led to the death of two members of her immediate family. Because of her status, Daisy is not entitled to avail of our Direct Provision Services. She

has been homeless for three to four years and found herself with no place to stay last December. For any one of us the threat of losing our home will cause extreme anxiety and worry. Daisy and those in her situation must live with this uncertainty and frustration every day. A sense of being lost characterises those who, like Daisy, must live on the margins and in the shadows of our society; this adds a huge burden of stress and desperation.

Every human heart yearns to belong; this yearning is deep and very basic. How many of us are prepared to depend totally on the generosity of friends for all our basic needs such as food, shelter, and money, safety and a place to belong. It is more than most of us would countenance, yet some of the most vulnerable persons among us have to depend on the help of friends and put up with being at the mercy of the often unscrupulous for the shelter and safety they need.

Yet in spite of all this hardship, Daisy is a hopeful, patient and resilient woman of faith. A good Muslim, she prays often and her gratitude for God's ongoing help is real. She believes her prayer is heard even if the answer is not the one she wanted. Yet there is a strong sense of God's providence and care in the small and ordinary support of friends in the midst of so much uncertainty. ●

Sr Anne Ryan is a Columban Sister based in Tallaght, Dublin.

Wishing all our subscribers, readers and supporters a very happy and peaceful Christmas and every blessing for 2019!





CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR A MISSIONARY

Fr Barry Cairns recalls one of the most delightful Christmas presents he ever received.

In the mission parish of Katase in Yokohama diocese where I was stationed, we had a special catechumenate class for couples where the wife was baptised, but the husband was not yet baptised.

Six couples came faithfully to the evening classes. I could sense a growing enthusiasm in five of the men, but one man, Tanaka-san, seemed quiet and worried.

It so happened that at that time I was building a

Christmas crib. I had asked an architect parishioner to draw a plan for me. He said, "I have drawn plans for houses and even a church, but never a stable!"

I followed his plan but I was behind schedule. Then Tanaka-san saw my struggling efforts and shyly said, "Can I help you?" I was delighted. He proved himself to be a natural handyman. We worked together off and on for three weeks and had the frame ready for the First Sunday of Advent.

My aim was to create an atmosphere of expectation for Christ's birth by having the crib frame at the church entrance on the first Sunday, the bamboo roof on the second, straw on the third, Mary, Joseph and an empty manger on the fourth Sunday of Advent. The infant Jesus was solemnly placed in his manger at Christmas midnight Mass by a kimono-clad young girl.

But back to Tanaka-san. He was born on the island of Shikoku with a long tradition of Buddhism and respect and prayer for ancestors. In a class in early December I had quoted our Japanese bishops telling us that the commandment 'Love your father and your mother' means also that after death we pray for our ancestors. Baptism does not cancel this if they belonged to another faith. The cloud of worry seemed to lift from Tanaka-san.

In the week before Christmas Mrs Tanaka said to me, "Let's go for coffee this week." At coffee she told me, "My husband wants to say something to you."

I can still vividly recall my reaction! I knew his deep family Buddhist background and so I expected a polite negative to his baptism with the others in the class. But Tanaka-san said, and his voice echoes in my heart as I write this, "Father, am I good enough for baptism?"

I choked with happiness. This was the most beautiful Christmas present I had ever received. It came alive again at the Easter vigil baptisms of six stalwart men, backed by their faith-filled wives.

Since then, over the years, Tanaka-san and I have together done a few other carpentry projects in the church and rectory - also quite a few coffees! He and his wife are a happy, praying couple. Sharing their faith with their children, grandchildren and friends. ●

Fr Barry Cairns was born in New Zealand in 1931. After studying to be a Columban missionary in Australia, he went to Japan in 1955 after ordination. After eleven years in parish work in Japan, he spent the next 13 years on the staff of the Columban seminary in Sydney before he returned to Japan in 1983. At 86 years of age he still serves in a small parish in Yokohama City.

Opposite Page: Some children visit the crib made by Tanaka-san and Fr Barry Cairns.

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MEET OUR NEW GENERAL COUNCIL



As the Missionary Society of St Columban begins its second century, a new General Council was elected at the General Assembly in Taiwan last September.

Irishman Fr Tim Mulroy has been selected as the Columbans' new Society Leader.

Responding to the news Fr Tim said, "As Columban Missionaries prepare for a new century of mission, I feel both humbled and honoured to be given this leadership position."

A former primary school teacher, he has been regional director in the US for the past six years. Originally from Meelick, Swinford, Co Mayo, 54-year-old Fr Mulroy was ordained in 1995.

"Coming from Mayo, I am conscious that I am walking in the footsteps of Fr John Blowick from Belcarra, one of

the founders of the Columban Missionaries, who led this international organisation during its infancy years," Fr Tim commented.

"Today, a century later, Columban Missionaries include women and men, married and single, lay and ordained from various countries, who strive to build bridges across our divided world and promote the unity of all God's children."

The new Society Vicar is Fr Brian Vale from New Zealand. Fr Joseph Kang was elected second councillor. Chilean Fr Alvaro Patricio Martinez Ibañez was elected as the other councillor. ●

Above is the new General Council of the Missionary Society of St Columban (l to r) Fr Tim Mulroy, Society Leader, Fr Joseph Kang, Councillor, Fr Brian Vale, Society Vicar, Fr Alvaro Patricio Martinez Ibañez, Councillor.