



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF ST. COLUMBAN (IRELAND)

PO BOX 2628, ST. AGNES ROAD, CRUMLIN, DUBLIN 12
TEL. 01-465 2466 EMAIL: msscbusiness@yahoo.ie

St. Columban

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2015

St. Columban (or his Latin name Columbanus) is to Central Europe as St. Patrick is to Ireland. This year we celebrate 1400 years since this most significant Irishman, a monk and evangeliser passed away in Bobbio, northern Italy.

Born in Ireland around 543. He is little known in Ireland, but is famous on the continent of Europe. He is often confused with his contemporary, Colmcille 521- 597 another significant Irishman and also a monk who went to the island of Iona off the coast of Scotland in 563. Columban and 12 other monks left their monastery in Bangor, Co. Down. Where to? They did not know. He said "It was my wish to visit the pagan peoples and have the gospel preached to them by us".

These men were first and foremost monks, that is, men who had committed themselves to follow Christ in a life of prayer and meditation. Columban was a scholar, well versed in the Sacred Scriptures and in Latin. He related to Kings, Princes and Bishops across central Europe. Some of his letters which survive show that he wrote critically to Bishops, and even to the Pope, to express his concern about some practices that he feared would damage the Church. He seems to have shown extraordinary leadership. Their lifestyle was simple and austere: prayer and work filled their day. "Let Christ paint his image in you" he used to say. It is interesting to note that they attracted other men, in huge numbers, to join their monasteries in France, Germany and Italy. Their motto was: "Let us belong to Christ, not to ourselves." Unfortunately little of this legacy of letters, sermons and poetry still remains.

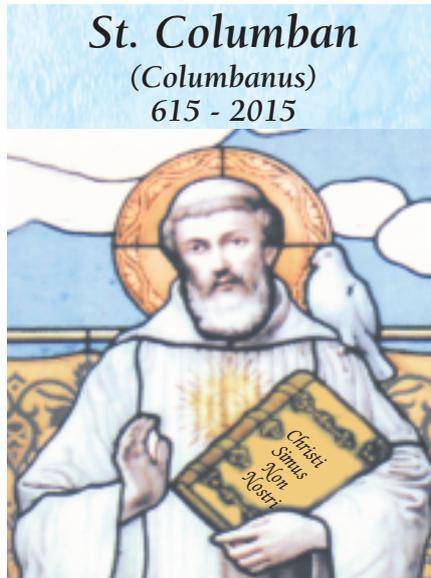
Situations and needs and expressions of missionary zeal have changed much over the centuries. What has not

changed from the sixth to the twenty-first century, is God's call to go out and bring the Good News of the Gospel. What has not changed, from Columban's time to ours, is the spirit of faith and love which impels the

missionary to enter into seemingly impossible situations and to try to do something about them. Columban showed courage and zeal and a willingness to suffer, because of his burning desire to spread the faith. Likewise, the stories told by the Columban Sisters today demonstrate the courage and zeal they show in their desire to share the deprivations and dangers of the people among whom they live and work.

Meet some of them:

Sr. Angela McKeever and Sr. Mary Anthony Ryan minister to prisoners in two far flung places: Santiago, Chile, and Hong Kong, respectively. In their visits to the prison they bring their love, with hope and comfort to the lonely and isolated, as well as spiritual strength.



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*Sr. Angela
McKeever and
Sr. Mary Anthony
Ryan*



Sr. Cris de Leon and Cecilia Cuizon in the Philippines are enthusiasts for the care of earth. Cris has started a new initiative with children and their mothers in the hope that they will be more ecologically aware as they grow up. "Daily survival in the midst of poverty is the primary concern of people in the aftermath of a series of typhoons", says Cris. "Nevertheless, I continue with my

Registered Office: 2/3 Terminus Mills, Clonskeagh Road, Dublin 6
Co. Reg. No: 497320 Charity No: CHY 19596 CRA 20077044

Directors: Mary McGuinness, Mary Patricia Quigley, Nora Mary O'Driscoll, Mary Duane, Rose Gallagher, Maureen Grant.



Luzon

classes in organic gardening. These children may signify the silent budding forth of the dream and hope to have more caring hands for the life of the earth".



Mindanao

Sr Cecilia Cuizon has a similar project for the special needs children and young adults in Mindanao.

Susanna Choi writes from the hills of the Kachin State in northern Myanmar:

"the people have

been through very difficult situations. The conflict continues between government troops and the Kachin army causing hardship, sickness, lack of food and death. I struggled a lot due to the situation here, yet it has

been a wonderful time for me personally and with ministry. I have been working with internally displaced people and conflict affected people in the mountains and jungle areas.... We were able to provide psycho-social and health care support as well as food and medicine. The



project extended to gender based violence, child protection and children's education".

Sr. Erisa Lee finds serious racial and regional discrimination in her area of Peru. "We have the jungle areas, the coastal areas and the mountain areas.

Ayacucho is on the outer edge of the Andes mountain range. After 20 years of killing and terrorist activity this is an area in need of healing and reconciliation. I work with the traumatised



youth to help bring hope, love and meaning into their lives".

The Sisters in Pakistan are with the poor and marginalised communities where only 2% of the total

population is catholic. The Sisters are engaged in a variety of projects ranging from income generating sewing classes and adult literacy with women to helping children with school books, copy books, pens, pencils etc. – all so that they can go to school. Education is seen as the only way out of poverty. Close to the heart are the children with special needs. Food, medicine and medical appliances and aids are always in demand.

Like the monks of old who were men dedicated to a life of prayer and meditation, so too are the missionaries of today dedicated to the person of Christ, and live a life of prayer and meditation.



Columban novices in Korea

The heart of their prayer would be in the spirit of Columban's prayer many centuries ago. "May I love and contemplate you alone and may my lamp ever burn and shine before you Show yourself to us who seek you, so that knowing you we may love you as warmly in return – may love you alone, desire you alone, contemplate you alone day and night and keep you always in our thoughts." (Sermon X11)

These Sisters, and all of us, thank you most sincerely for your support over the years that has enabled us to continue this mission of Jesus in the world. They rely on your on-going generosity to enable them to continue bringing the love and compassion of our loving God to some of the most needy of our world.

Sr. Patricia