



## Columban Sisters Worldwide Mission News

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# LAZARUS IN MYITKYINA

*By Sr. Mary Dillon*

*Columban Sister Mary Dillon worked for many years in Korea before assuming her present assignment in Myanmar (Burma).*

When I saw him I could only think of Lazarus at the gate, the searing parable Jesus told the Pharisees in St. Luke's gospel (Lk.16:20). He spoke of a poor man lying at the gate of a rich man's house, covered with sores, being licked by dogs and all but forgotten. In Myitkyina (pronounced mich'-nia), I met a Lazarus, a young man with AIDS thrown out of the family home, abandoned by all and living in a little hut nearby. No one spoke to him. No one visited him. His brother would push in a plate of food to him once a day without saying a word.

Du Hkwang, a small man, was in his early thirties, unmarried and belonged to a well-off family. He had taken anti-retroviral drugs for awhile but decided to do without them and gradually got worse as



*Sr. Mary Dillon helps treat an AIDS patient.*

his immune system broke down. Unable to walk or sit up, he lay day after day under a piece of tarpaulin, unwashed, incontinent, stinking. I am sure if there were dogs around they would have come "to lick his sores" (Lk. 16:21). It was in this miserable state that I found him, this poor modern-day Lazarus. I tried talking to his family, but to no avail. His elderly mother, his uncle, a brother and sister-in-law wanted nothing to do with him. Fear of AIDS was deeply rooted in them and they dreaded "catching" it. Their son, their brother was a

non-person in the family and nothing would move them on this.

Two years ago, through the generous support of friends of the Columban Sisters, we built a home to care for forgotten and forsaken people with HIV/AIDS. Today we care for over 70 people, young and old, with HIV/AIDS and I would have brought Du Hkwang there, but he was too weak and the journey would have been too much. So, with Lucy the wonderful woman who works with me, I went to get some clean clothes and we washed him and gave him a nourishing drink. His emaciated body, full of sores, some with maggots, was a dreadful sight. We did what we could to make him comfortable, this man who, like Christ himself, was forsaken by all.

On returning to the home that evening, I spoke of poor Du Hkwang to some of the residents. They knew what it was to be ostracized; they



too had felt the pain of being unwanted in society; they had suffered the stigma of having AIDS. But now, thanks to those who support the Columban Sisters and their worldwide missions these special people had been given medication, good care and love and they were up and walking. Some of the men came to me. “Sister, if you can get us there, we will visit Du Hkwang and look after him.” So from then on, two of them went each day to wash, clean and feed poor Lazarus, while they talked and sang to him. From the depths of their own suffering humanity they cared gently for their brother. I went with them most days, but even when I could not be there, they never failed to look after him. I was deeply moved by their love

and by the kindness they showed. Out of their own poverty they gave all they had, ministering to this “least of the brothers”. “I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.” (Matthew 25:40).



*Abandoned by all, Du Hkwang lies on the floor of his hut.*

Du Hkwang died shortly after, alone in his little hut. He had never talked even once in the weeks we

knew him. I feel sure that, like Lazarus, “he was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom” (Lk. 16:22). May he have joy now, he who knew so little of it on earth. But I do believe that in those last weeks, he met angels here, too, in the persons of the men who unfailingly nursed him and knew him to be a brother. In my heart I called them our “AIDS Angels” and thanked God.

## Thank You For Supporting The Columban Sisters

*The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban is a religious congregation of women dedicated to lives of prayer and service. They work among the poor, the sick and the elderly in their missions in Chile, China/Hong Kong, England, Ireland, Korea, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Scotland and the United States, and are deeply grateful to all who support their worldwide missionary work.*

*For more information, visit [www.columbansisters.org](http://www.columbansisters.org), call the Columban Sisters Mission Office at 716-934-4515, or email [missionoffice@stcolumbanhome.org](mailto:missionoffice@stcolumbanhome.org). Contributions can be made using the enclosed envelope or by contacting the Mission Office.*