

## **Korean Region Pre GA Assembly, Oct 10-12, 2023**

The regional assembly was held in the Columban Central House in Seoul from the 10<sup>th</sup> of October to the 12<sup>th</sup> of the same month. During the first day 17 missionaries attended: eleven permanent members assigned in Korea, four lay missionaries working in Korea and two members from the General Council: Brian Vale (vicar general of the Society) and Kang Seungwon Joseph (first councilor).

The first act of the regional assembly was the morning prayer followed by the opening of the assembly led by the regional director. The group then proceeded to the election of the chairperson. The following were nominated for the position of chairperson: Kim YoungIn Gregorio, Lee Kyungja Christina & Gonzalo Borquez. Kim YoungIn Gregorio got the majority of the votes, however, due to his many other responsibilities in preparation for the General Assembly he declined and proposed that Gonzalo take the role. The majority agreed and Gonzalo was elected chairperson. Gonzalo at the very beginning asked about which language will be used during the meeting, and everyone agreed to the use of both Korean and English.

### **Day 1, Oct 10 Forenoon - Session 1 (The Region)**

Having completed the business mentioned above the regional assembly went on to Session One which was a presentation by the regional director Seo Kyunghi Stephen. The regional director's presentation focused on the following: (a) The restructuring of the region; (b) Regional members and staff; (c) Pastoral directions of the region (based on the themes of synodality: fellowship, participation & mission); (d) Activities and programs during the year that reflect 'participation' - the theme for 2023.

The present regional offices will therefore be restructured into three major departments as follows: (A) Administration Dept, (B) Mission Dept. (C) The Vocation Dept.

(A) Administration Department: This Department will include the regional bursar, the communications coordinator, SIM contact person, safeguarding officer, archivist and Benefactors Office.

(B) The Vocation Department will include vocations to the Lay missionaries, vocations to the missionary priesthood and candidates for the Priest Associates.

(C) The Mission Department: This will support the work of Mission on the ground in Korea - eg JPIC, IRD, Peace Ministry, Art Ministry, Mission Education, Mission Research, Migrant Workers etc

During the discussions there were questions on the role and functions of the offices in the various departments? Whether or not the Regional Director will be directly in charge of managing the section when there will no longer be Columban priests as section heads? The regional Director responded to this saying that he will be directly managing them. Clarification was asked about how this change reflects the participation advocated by Synodality? The director explained that there will be monthly meetings with the staff for monitoring and if a big problem comes up it will be handled by the regional council. This will need training, education, and formation of the co-workers. This change will be implemented by the end of October.

At the moment the priorities for the Korean region in terms of ministry are vocations and the benefactor's office. For the coming year the benefactor office has plans to visit 10 parishes for mission appeals, and the office will coordinate priests that will take care of that work. But the question was asked: if there is no longer one person in charge of this office, who contacts the parishes for appeals? It would be difficult for a lay person to do that task in the Korean Church. The answer for this was that we do not contact the parish only for a mission appeal but also to let the Local Church know of our presence and what we can offer to them. With regard to benefactors, the priest in charge of a particular area will have a monthly Mass and he will be asking for promotion in the parish of that area. The Staff will share the responsibility of working with the benefactors, doing the phone calls, registration of new benefactors, managing the CM withdrawal-transfer system, postage and announcement of Masses through text messages.

During the presentation of the Mission Department's role and structures, some questions were asked as to why Mission education/promotion is not part of the Mission Department? There will be more explanations about details concerning administration, vocation, and mission departments as time goes on and changes can be made in the operation of the organizational structures. The regional director on visitation explained the changes to individual members but one suggestion that surfaced was to have communications in a group level rather than one to one conversation about the restructuring.

There was a reaction to the new structures at the beginning. However, at the end and after having had time to talk about it, people began to understand the plan and accept it.

For next year 2024 the theme will be Mission - Mission to the Wider world. It was emphasized that the mission starts with oneself. Then there was a presentation of a one-year plan of action for 2024 to concretely live the call of mission.

#### **Day 1, Oct 10 - Afternoon Session 2: (Finances):**

This was presented by the Regional Director who talked about the financial reality of our Region. The Budget Income & Expenses were presented for the previous financial year, including a breakdown in terms of expenditure in the different apostolates. There was also a brief Report on the Society Investments in Korea.

#### **Day 2, Oct 11 - Forenoon Session 3: (Amendments to the Constitutions):**

During the second day three more permanent members join the regional assembly, bringing the number of regional members present up to 14. During the morning session and part of the afternoon we reviewed and voted on the proposals to amend the constitutions. The group decided to do simple voting method by rising the hand to support an amendment or leave it as it is and the result of the voting is as follows:

**1. Inclusive language (Submitted by TMU, PMU, Oceania) – While not a canonical issue,**

**Everyone supported the use of inclusive language.**

**2. Proposal to change C 330** The Superior General and his Council reside in the central house of the Society **(Submitted by TMU & Chris Saenz).**

**Proposed change: *The Superior General and his vicar reside in the central house of the Society.***

**Change: 8 Votes Do Not Change : 4**

**3. Delete art 330 on Procurator General (Submitted by PMU, GC, Oceania & Joe Hargaden)**

**Change: 10 Votes Do Not Change: 2**

**4. Re TMU Proposed Changes to C.310., D.310.1, C.311.2, C.311.3, D.311.1, and D.311.3:**

**No support for the proposals**

**However there was a new proposal re the suggested amendment to D. 310.1 that “an RMU may elect an additional delegate if its combined number of Columban Lay Missionaries and Society members is more than 40**

**We propose** “That the Society should define first what it means to be a formal CLM before going through this process” .

**In favour 13 votes for.**

**5.. Re the PMU Amendments on admission to membership in the Society, the group proposed an amendment to D 212.(c) to read as follows.**

*“Towards the completion of his FMA, for candidates attached to a Mission Unit, the Regional Director of the Region of Origin of the student with the consent of his council, on the recommendation of 3 members of the unit designated by*

*office in the Unit's structures, will decide on whether a candidate is suitable to renew the oath of temporary membership".*

**All supported this amendment - Rationale: the Regional Director and Formation Staff of the Region of Origin would normally know more about a particular student than the General Council.**

**6. Proposal by Peter Woodruff re Walking together - No support!**

**7 Proposal to amend C. 338 from Oceania to reduce the Regional Council to the vicar and one councillor - No support So no Change.**

**8. Proposal re Special Purpose of the Society:  
No support for the proposal.**

**9. Re the proposal to change D. 404.3, we do not agree with having just one member of the General Council on the boards of legal entities holding Society Properties. So instead we propose the following amendment:**

**The Superior General and one of the members of the General council are members of all the boards of legal entities holding Society property. The approval of the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, is required for all decisions that are referred to in C.407.1 and C.408.**

**All were in favour of this amendment**

**10. Proposal to Change Constitution 313.3 (b), (c), (e) by Chris  
IE. The voting Procedure - In case of a tie in voting "election is decided by  
*seniority of aggregation, ordination or age in that order,*  
*change to junior of aggregation, ordination or age in that order.***

**All in favour of that Proposal**

**11. Re the Proposal to change c.314.1 , we propose the following amendment**  
***'Priests who have been permanent members of the Society for at least 5 years, and who as priests have experienced overseas mission, are eligible for election to the office of Superior General or Vicar General or Councillor.***

**All were in Favour**

**14. With regard to proposal to change C. 219. That the Society may extend associate status to priests who participate for a determined time in its life and work"**

**No support - Leave as is**

**15. With regard to C. 230 re Mass Stipends (Rights and Obligations of Members), we propose the following amendment**

**C. 230.** Members may own, acquire, administer and dispose of property which is theirs by strictly personal title. Priests of the Society also have ownership and use of offerings for Masses they celebrate **in accordance with c. 951 CIC and local Church directives**

**In favour - 14**

**16. Present C. 303 - Leave as is no need for a Directory Article - 16**

**17. Present Articles C. 308.2 & D.308: Leave as is - 16**

**18. Proposal to add a new Directory Article D. 313.1**

**D. 313.1.** The President of the General Assembly shall appoint two scrutineers and a secretary who shall record the votes at each and every stage of the elections. The secretary shall be responsible for publishing the complete results of each ballot and promptly making them available appropriately to the general membership of the Society.

**In Favour - 16**

**19. C. 315 Proposed Amendment (under-lined addition)**

Should a newly elected Superior General or Councillor not be a member of the General Assembly, he is to be invited to take part in the Assembly with full voting rights, but the dispatch of business need not be delayed pending his arrival. Nevertheless the Assembly cannot proceed to other elections or take any decisions without the presence of the newly-elected Superior General  
In favour - 15

20. C. 319.1 & C 319.2 Leave it as it is... 18 votes.

21. D. 321.3 Amend by adding the underline addition: **Any two councillors may call for a Council meeting when they deem it necessary. A Council meeting will be convoked without delay.**

Amendment to add "without delay" approved : In favour 17 votes

22. C. 328 Propose to have a separate Article to cover the situation where "the Superior General becomes permanently impaired..."  
In favour 17 Votes - But we did not propose a possible article.

23. D. 341.3 - (Re Job Descriptions) - Leave as is

24. D. 342.3 "Re the proposed amendment dealing with the eligibility of a Spiritual Year director to be a member of the seminary staff as rector or councillor"

We ask that this be discussed at the next formators Meeting

In favour - 18

25. D. 405.1 Material Resources - Leave as is - 18 votes

26. D. 405.7 Leasing Leave as it is.

27. D. 405.9 Alienation of Society's property Leave as As it is.

28. D 406. "Proposed Amendment to D. 406.

**In fundraising and distributing funds the Superior General and the Society Superiors at every level comply with the requirements of local laws and Government regulations (cf. Can 1259, Can 1290)**

**In Favor 18 votes**

**29. C. 407.1 Leave as it is.**

**30. C. 407.2 A Proposed Amendment: C. 407.2 The written permission of the Regional Director, having obtained the advice of his Council, is required for the acquisition by any title of movable property to which some onus or condition is attached.**

**In favour 14 votes.**

#### **Day 2, Oct 11 - Afternoon Session 4 (Discussions on the IRMU Proposals)**

The group was invited to discuss the six recommendations that emerged from the IRMU meeting. Instead of 'small group discussion' the group decided to have a free-flowing conversation in a plenary session. A summary of what was discussed on each of the six recommendations is as follows.

#### **Proposal 1: <To create a culture of accountability supported by rigorous policy procedures and ongoing monitoring>**

- In the comment section concerning clericalism, why focus only on only on priests? If we have to develop a culture of accountability it needs to cover not only the ordained but also LMs and co-workers.
- On the comment section, "as the number declines". Numbers do not really matter.
- Creating rules and regulations on "co-responsibility" aren't going to solve that problem.
- In the IRMU meeting, this was meant as a way to revitalize mission. e.g. use of the internet for promotion.
- Ordained Priests are the only group that are not required to update.
- How to ask guys who don't want to participate to participate?



- Is there a big problem in our Region in terms of cooperation?
- The Korea Region doesn't have enough culture of accountability and co-responsibility. Difficulty of getting people to participate, e.g. participation of Regional members in the Zoom Talks in preparation for the GA? Attendance at the Regional Meeting?
- A Solution - Cut Maintenance i.e. a guy who doesn't want to participate can support himself.

**Proposal 2: <To conduct a strategic, independent review of the Columban Society in the light of mission priorities (JPIC/ IRD, etc.) and to create a strategic plan of action based on the review>.**

- Problem in our mission priorities: JPIC, IRD. Not a task of one appointed person alone. It is shared by all.
- I am lost with what is being spoken here. I don't know where I fit.
- Need a review in different aspects of JPIC to readdress balance: e.g. Ecology is over-emphasized - there is an over-focus on <Laudato Si> at the expense of labor rights issues, migrants.
- On JPIC, IRD. I don't see the practice, especially IRD.
- How can we be more aware of what's happening in JPIC and IRD?

**Proposal 3: <To facilitate an independent review and assessment of the vocation programs based on internal and external data, trends, and other congregational plans with a view to creating a strategic plan based on the outcomes>**

- In favor. If feedback is true, are you going to take people in if there is no future for the Society? Is it fair and just to recruit people who have no long-term future?
- Based on the external views, it is clear that there is no future for the Society **as we are**. So, we have to do something different...
- Expectation of honesty from GC whether we continue or not. Closing vocations and formation means the end of the Society. So, I can make my

own honest decision.

- Cost-benefit. Putting our resources into Vocation and Formation is questionable. No need for clerical ministers to continue the work of evangelization so No future for those joining us.?
- We have our roots in Ireland. We were an Irish Society and now that is dying - we have Filipinos, Koreans, Myanmarist, Fijians, Chileans. Now let the "Irish" step step back push forward all the rest of the world. Who knows what may grow out of that?
- Not sure about the statement of the decline of vocation. Experience in the US, small dioceses have a bigger number of seminarians but coming from different backgrounds, from generations of migrants and not Caucasians. Issue is not about whether there are vocations or not. What do we do to attract vocations?
- Question and doubt about where the data about decline in vocation is collected and who does the analysis, how it is done and the type of judgment that influences the interpretation of data. In the end it's a survey and foreseeing the future based on your current data. On a recent visit to one of the diocesan seminaries in the Philippines - the Rector of a seminary said to us with the number of their students, there is no crisis in vocations.
- There are new possibilities. What's happening in the Western Church - new associations of of the faithful, new congregations where men and women, priests and laity, married and single work together.
- Until now I am the only Chinese member. Sometimes I say I am the first one and maybe the last one.

**Proposal 4: <To grow our partnership with Columban Lay Missionaries and co-workers as an integral part of the Columban mission and gospel witness to the universal Church>.**

- The word "co-workers" came out a lot IRMU. How do we enrich this part (with co-workers) in doing mission work?
- What is the clear definition of a Columban co-worker? People we work

with in mission? Does it include all our staff?

- Co-workers are those who, because of their particular responsibility, directly influence Columban mission, e.g. Magazine office..
- All staff may not necessarily be called co-workers but only those participating in the Columban mission work.
- Benefactors are not co-workers but rather companions in mission.
- Building a Bridge – partnership should be both ways. Ordained giving to the LMS but LMs giving back to the Columbans all Growing in partnership.
- Need to review the relationship with LMs and Columbans. Look at the model based on partnership when doing a certain work, clarify the task and the team that does the task.

**Proposal 6: <To create a culture of mentoring and support for leadership that is shared and sustainable and includes co-workers>**

- At the moment, in Korea Region, we...?
- When we (The General Council) arrived in Hong Kong, we built relationships by socializing (e.g. barbecues, meetings, doing activities together) and natural human relationships. Through it we build trust, communication, cooperation, synodality and continue to mentor each other. A Helpful model.
- On LM partnership in the Korea Region, there is active involvement in JPIC and SIM but difficulty working together in the Vocation Ministry.
- Clericalism is very much present in the Korean Local Church. Even though I know that concelebration separates the clergy from the laity, there is pressure always to to concelebrate with priests on the altar.
- Priests who work in the Social Service Ministry deliberately just wear shirts and stoles when celebrating the Mass.
- As a Korean Columban, even though I learned something different due to my experience abroad, I still know the difficulty of the ordinary Korean people due to the culture and tradition of Confucianism.
- Partnership and leadership are related to Synodality. Openness is the key.

**6. To explore and define a new expression of Columban missionaries:  
identity, language,**

- Is there a formal reflection about Columban culture? How to explain to newcomers what Columban culture is?
- The essence of our culture is found in the oath that we promised when we became a member of the Society.
- Need for new words to express our faith. We are still using words and images from a long time ago. We still have the message but can't communicate it with people in 2023.
- Columban identity now is more complex than before. We speak more languages now in the Society and that's part of our identity that we need to embrace. Our identity is evolving as will the way we articulate the message.
- Any insights in the Bible about God came from the experience of people who moved into a new culture or met with persons of a different culture.

**Day 3, Oct 12 - Forenoon, Session 5.**

This was the final session of our meeting, and the attendance was 16 missionaries - two less than the previous day. During this session we dedicated time to talk about any other business and we had a sincere conversation about different issues we are facing as region and feeling. The following is a summary of what was discussed during this time.

(a) The first issue that was thrown into the conversation was the issue of Columban properties and how to get an opinion on this? It will be on the agenda for the next regional meeting or assembly.

(b) Another suggestion - that we have an annual plan for regional meetings or assemblies, and to announce these regional meetings or assemblies six months ahead of time. In addition, it was suggested that it would be great to have some

district meetings ahead of the regional meeting. The date for the Spring Columban Meeting was fixed.

(c) There was a big discussion about the participation of the meeting. Many of the participants were over 70 years old, while more than half of the members of the region are in their 60s and below. So the question here was what can we do to increase participation? How do we invite people who are not participating in our communal activities?

Some suggestions to this referred to our Constitutions. We promise to do what we are asked to do, so it would be good to have a seminar on our Constitutions and the meaning of our promise to the Society. Maybe, to have a common study on how we understand the Constitutions. It was pointed out that if obedience is gone, there is no Society of St. Columban.

Also, about this same matter one proposal was to engage an outsider to do a consultation to get to know the reasons for people not attending these meetings? It was noted that actually it was not the people in retirement age who are not participating. So someone asked the question: Are there other reasons besides of the one they say for not attending? Perhaps resistance?

(d) Then the issue of problems in communication between Regional Leadership and Individual Members. There was a mention about a similar situation in another RMU of one person who was struggling with the regional community and the regional director, but this person asked for a special reconciliation committee and after that that member was able to participate in the meetings and gatherings. Can we do something like this here in Korea? Another member on this same topic pointed out that we always had people in this region who did not attend the meetings because of requirements of the diocese. Also people get their energy in their ministries, and some get their energy sucked out by their fellow Columbans. As a region we need to face this issue and ask how do we Columbans suck out each other's energy? Another member said that it would be good to invite members to the regional council meetings and talk about their ministry.

(e) The regional director thanked everyone for the different suggestions, but said realistically that we cannot do all of them at once. After saying so, he proceeded to make clear that his role as a director is defined in the Constitutions, and sometimes people have different understandings of the role. Since he accepted the role as a leader in the region, he followed what is written in the constitutions. If there is any misunderstanding, he asked the members to look at the constitutions.

In addition, it was the observation of the regional director during the past year and a half, that we all need to also see how we can make changes in our behavior for the next year and a half. He was not only asking for support but also for corrections when he commits mistakes. Because the near future will be different from what we were doing in the past, it could be a little uncomfortable at the beginning so he asked us to be open and let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit.

End of the report

Presented by Gonzalo Borquez SSCC

With the help of the notes taken by Jason Antiquera SSCC