

BRITAIN REGIONAL REPORT TO GAPC CHAIR, NOV. 2023.

CURRENT SITUATION. As ever, our principal concern is Mission Promotion and Fundraising, carried out by way of parish visits by the appeals team, school visits, the “Far East” (with Ireland), the website, Pat Sayles’s Prayer Trust booklets, postal campaigns and the processing of donations and legacies. Income remains steady at around £ 3.5 million p.a., of which 60% goes to support overseas mission.

In addition, we maintain our Justice, Peace & Ecology work through school workshops and publications in concert with other JPE groups and through social media, spearheaded by James Trewby and Ellen Teague. Mauricio Silva and Lay Missionaries Ger and Nathalie are engaged in Inter-Religious Dialogue initiatives and staff a female migrants’ refuge.

We are now down to ten priests (all aged 60 or over) and two lay missionaries. We rely increasingly on the efforts of our “co-workers” (i.e. employees, excluding domestic staff), presently 14 in number. There are just two Columban properties in Britain – the Centre House in Solihull near Birmingham and a house in Ealing, West London.

CONCERNS. Our donor base is ageing rapidly and we fear we might fall off a “financial cliff” in five to ten years’ time. The average age of our priests is also advancing, while the number of lay missionaries has fallen from five to two in the last year. At some stage, we might run out of Columbans willing and able to run the Region.

FUTURE PROSPECTS. It seems clear that our future viability will depend even more upon salaried lay staff. However, we are unsure as to how far down this road we can go without fundamental changes being made to our Constitutions. Could we then look to having lay personnel as Trustees or even a lay person as “C.E.O.” (occupying much of the present role of Regional Director) ?

John Boles.