

## **Taiwan Mission Unit RMU Leader's Report November 2023**

### **1. TMU Plan of Action**

The TMU Plan of Action (POA) for 2022-2024 will be reviewed again next year. This is timely because the CLM International Meeting and General Assembly will both happen next year, too. The TMU Structures of Administration will also be reviewed and updated according to the results of these two big meetings.

The TMU is remaining faithful to our POA. Our two priority ministries are among Indigenous Peoples based in TaiAn Nan San Cun Parishes in Miaoli County and Bade and Pingzhen in Taoyuan City; and among Migrant Workers, Immigrants and Victims of Human Trafficking.

Our ministry among Indigenous Peoples has been a TMU priority since January 2005. Columbans have been staffing the TaiAn Nan San Cun area since 1992 where the indigenous group *Atayal* lives. In September this year, **Salustino Villalobos Mondragon** (Peru) replaced Taaremon Matauea (Fiji) as parish priest when the latter was assigned to the Region of Oceania. Long Term lay missionary (LM), **Bae Sihyeon Teresa** (Korea) is involved in this ministry mainly helping out in the liturgy and communion service and focusing on the enhancement of relationships among the young mothers and the youth. They are hoping to receive funding for the rebuilding of the Dagan Chapel which was caught on fire several years ago. **Seok Jinwook Antonio** (Korea) is parish priest at St. Michael Church in Bade and Immaculate Conception of Mary Church in Pingzhen, both in Taoyuan where most parishioners belong to the indigenous group, *Amis*. Jinwook is also serving as chaplain for two centers for developmentally challenged individuals, Aijia and Tianshi.

Our ministry among Migrant Workers and Immigrants has been a TMU priority since January 1999. At present, Columbans continue to work in two centers in Hsinchu Diocese, namely: Hope Workers' Center (HWC) which was founded by a Columban priest, George Hergott in 1986 and Vietnamese Migrant Workers and Immigrants Office (VMWIO) which was founded in 2004 by Nguyen Van Hung.

**Nguyen Van Hung** (Vietnam) is the director of VMWIO while he is also the diocesan pastoral chaplain for migrants and immigrants. **Ryu Sunjong Andrea** (Korea) took on the role of HWC director since May 2023. Sunjong is also the parish priest of Heavenly Mother Church in Toufen City replacing Henry Amado Servan Vallejos. Two long term LMs work at HWC: **Joan Yap** (Philippines) works as shelter supervisor and pastoral coordinator for the immigrants and their families and **Sherryl Lou Capili** (Philippines) works as the pastoral coordinator for the English-speaking community. In May, the HWC launched the Care for Creation Ministry focusing on education and awareness campaigns among the migrant workers on how to better care for the environment.

Presently we are involved in other areas of ministry (areas we will continue to staff while we can). Long term LM **Reina Mosqueda** (Philippines) continues to work at Holy Family Center in Zhunan and

second term LM **Febie Gonzales** (Philippines) works at Aijia center in Taoyuan City. Long term LM Kim Jung Woong (Korea) and second term LM Lee Jiyoung (Korea) finished their involvement at Hengxing Xuefang Center were reassigned back to the Region of Korea in October. These 3 centers provide service to mentally and physically challenged adults.

Long term LM **Jhoanna Resari** (Philippines) is working with people living with and affected with HIV/AIDS through the AGAPE center where she is also the coordinator and founder. The HIV/AIDS education program continues to be integrated with the ministry among migrant workers and immigrants. Jao is also the secretary of the diocesan chaplain for migrants and immigrants. **Joe McSweeny** (USA) does spiritual direction not only among Catholics but among people of other faith denominations, as well as working with 12-Step Spirituality groups.

This year, some Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs in Taiwan have resumed. We have one diocesan priest from HeBei province in CPE who receives support from CFC. We hope to continue to support five CPE students in 2024.

Most of the members continue to study Mandarin language to help them in their ministries. While working full-time in our apostolates, all of us also have administrative jobs to fulfill. We work well together and are willing to help each other in our various responsibilities.

## **2. Morale/Spirit in the Mission Unit**

This year, TMU said goodbye to 4 members: 2 ordained and 2 LMs. This has affected the morale and spirit in the Mission Unit which used to be high. Saying farewell to companions and friends was not easy. In September, the entire group went to Hualien for our eight-day annual retreat and the 2-day TMU Pre-GA Convention.

Our way of being on mission is as essential as the work we do on mission. In service to God and the human family, we seek to be a living witness to partnership, equality, the empowerment of women and the laity, group decision making, and shared responsibility. We make efforts to be present during our weekly gatherings and the monthly meetings and this has helped us to know more about each other and develop trust among ourselves.

## **3. Review of intercultural living adjustments**

The TMU presently consists of members from Korea (3), Peru (1), Philippines (5), Vietnam (1), and USA (1). The majority of the members are from Asia and this has been the reality in the TMU for the past number of years. Intercultural issues that exist in the group are small tensions that are felt when a group of different nationalities live and work together. We also try our best to be mindful when communicating with each other because the use of English language could still be a challenge for some members. The group deals with the tensions fairly well by being open and honest to voice out any misunderstanding or hurt caused by cultural insensitivity. There is freedom to celebrate cultural events if a member wishes to do so. This year, we did not have much opportunity to integrate this in our monthly meetings due to unforeseen happenings that are personal and health-related.

#### **4. Personnel**

As mentioned above, 4 members left the TMU this year. As of this month (November), there are 11 members in the TMU: 5 ordained and 6 LMs.

We employ a local lady to work part-time as our central house cook and cleaner. The TMU also employs a full-time local social worker in the TaiAn Nan San Cun parish area to direct the parish's social care program. She is also the parish secretary.

According to our contract with the diocese "the Missionary Society of St Columban undertakes to maintain a minimum of three members, one of whom is an ordained, for works of the apostolate in the Diocese of Hsinchu." Our contract with the diocese has been renewed early this year and is valid until January 31, 2028.

#### **5. Material Resources**

All the members of the TMU who are working in diocesan ministries receive a living allowance to cover their maintenance and other expenses. Five members receive free accommodation while six members rent rooms. The ministries to migrant workers and immigrants are financially self-sufficient.

Accounting is being done in Hong Kong. We still maintain a bank account with the Hsinchu Diocese. The Bursar has a regular meeting with the finance council to keep up with our finances. We will continue to hire the local auditor.

#### **6. Significant Changes in the TMU in the past year and notable changes foreseen.**

The departures of four members within one year is a significant change in the TMU. Because of this, some had to take on the administrative roles that they left behind. Some members also needed to change ministries or wear more hats in addition to what they already have at present. With the upcoming CLM International Meeting, the TMU might have a reduced number of LMs if some of them would be reassigned to another RMU to contribute to respond where there is a greater need. It is also sad for the TMU that we could not receive FMA students due to the restrictions of visa requirements.

## **My Personal Reflection as TMU Coordinator**

I have been serving as TMU Coordinator since 2018. Before the pandemic happened, my knowledge and encounter with the international Society was limited to what I read in the emails and the Columban magazines. At that time, the number of ordained, lay missionaries, and FMA students in the TMU would be around 20 and the delegation of roles in the mission unit was manageable. Since the beginning until now, we do not have an office staff. TMU members multitask between handling coordinating roles and being engaged in full time ministries. When the pandemic hit three years ago, we became more present to the international Society and more connected and updated through the Zoom gatherings. Personally, I had a wider view and better understanding of Columban mission by hearing the stories from other RMU Leaders, the General Council, and the LMCLT. My concern about the wider Society grew and developed over time, especially when I had the opportunity to participate in the IRMU Meeting in Seoul.

I observed that before, most of us were more concerned about preserving, protecting, and justifying our own RMUs and ministries. As time passed by and as we become more exposed to the current realities that the Society is facing, some members have become more open to being assigned where there is a greater need, but I cannot also blame those who are reluctant to be uprooted from their current assignments, especially Columbans nearing their retirement age.

I have participated in the RMU Leaders Zoom meetings, the GAPC Speaker Series events and the CLM Courageous Conversations. I believe that these sessions are helpful for us to slowly open our ears and heart and mind in order to realize and accept that we can no longer continue to do things in the same way when we had many active members, and that we have to be hopeful and cooperative in planning for our future. The sessions that hope to facilitate inner work among us could have been a useful tool in opening up not just our brains but most importantly our hearts. It is a pity that many were not able to participate and we missed hearing their stories. It is understandable that many of us are still in denial that change is needed and we, personally, need to let go of our attachment to certain things that serve as obstacles to us moving forward. There is still tension between what we should do and what we want to do.

Our faith in God, our talents, our values, our love for the poor and the marginalized and the exploited earth and our trust to each other would be our strengths in moving forward. I think we are all waiting to hear the 'options' for structures for a smaller group. Many of us are coming from the Regional structures mindset and experience and it could be alarming to hear that this has to change. It might be hard on our part to reconfigure our present structures and so part of me is hoping that we would be presented with examples of structural models for a smaller membership. On the other hand, RMUs also need to visualize how they can function without being burned out and pressured to fill in some existing roles that actually we can let go. Even if the TMU is a mission unit, we have become smaller in number of members and we also have to decide where to direct our energy and passion. Some RMUs are also controlled by the law of the government in terms of fundraising which puts limits to a possible change in their structures and even to amalgamate with another RMU. Based on experience and what I have witnessed, it continues to be a challenge to fill in roles such as coordinators or contact persons for

JPIC and IRD. I think that we can let go of these roles but continue to conduct the Webinars for those who are engaged in these Society priority ministries, and not just invite the coordinators/contact persons. I think it would be more meaningful and fruitful if, aside from sharing one's experience, there would be some concrete plan and action inspired by what we can take away from the online sessions.

I also think that we need a simpler leadership system where ordained members and LMs can work in partnership. Our responsibilities pile up and many of us are burned out. Let us make things simpler than what we have now. For instance, at present, there is an LMLT and Coordinating Committee (CC) or Regional Council (RC) in each RMU. The practice of LMs going to the LMLT for their concerns and then LMLT consults or escalates the matter to the CC or RC when needed consumes a lot of time and energy in order to receive approval from the latter. Is it possible to just have one leadership team where both ordained and LMs are represented? What kind of entity do we need to be in order to make this possible?

I also think that we have been careful to ask Columbans to leave an RMU because we value the history, work and mission, friendships and relationships that we have established. It has also been heartbreaking for Columbans to leave their second home. I think our current situation calls for us to vacate certain RMUs and be in mission areas where we can work together with the poorer and marginalized communities and bring our rich experiences of living the examples of Jesus to seek for justice and peace and at the same time care for our common home. Columbans also need to be in mission areas where we could offer support to one another. "I'll do what I want" could be an obstacle for our future. I hope we can concentrate in doing mission in a few certain countries and keep a few offices to continue the communications and fundraising.

With the diminishing numbers of the ordained, LMs and seminarians, I think we have to be open to seek help from the experts in using up to date techniques in reaching out to our target audience or prospects for vocations. I still think that there are many young people who are discerning the kind of life that they want to live, including a missionary life. It could have been us who have changed over time - our energy level, our passion, our enthusiasm - but younger people continue to find a more meaningful life and are ready to respond to God's call like we did. If we want to act now, some of us would need to leave what we are doing and be willing to be part of the mission awareness and vocation promotion.

As a lay person and as a woman, I used to get various reactions from different people when they find out about my role as coordinator of the mission unit. There are priests from other congregations who are curious about our structures and I had to explain to them about my role. Most of them are curious about handling any confidential matters pertaining to the ordained and we have to explain that we have a Society Delegate who is an ordained member who handles confidential matters. I attended the Association of Major Religious Superiors in Taiwan once and it was interesting because the MSSC is listed under the male congregations. I had to join the meeting of the ordained superiors from other congregations but those who know the Columbans helped me out to feel at ease. At the bishop's office, most of the staff are aware about this unique structure because Peter O'Neill had explained about this to the bishop before he left Taiwan and when the TMU elected Vida Hequilan as coordinator. It also

couldn't be avoided that some priests and sisters are still not comfortable and continue to ask questions. It is also helpful when TMU members know how to respond. During the first time when our group arrived in Taiwan, I will not forget the ordained members explaining how they have been working on for the Society to acknowledge lay missionaries – men and women, to be regarded as equal partners in mission, that we have the same baptismal call and no one superior among us. This was not easy to accept for many and there were also instances when some would not follow or forgot about the procedure when it comes to consultations on new assignments in the diocese. The TMU members would discuss about the concerns during our group meetings and come up with a response. On the other hand, there are also encouraging remarks that I continue to receive from other people. They express that they are amazed with how the Columbans work together and support a lay person and a woman as their representative.

As I gained more experiences including the challenges, I see myself not as a leader but as a co-leader. Many times, I had to explain that even if I am the coordinator of the TMU, I cannot make decisions by myself and that major decisions are made by the group meeting together. The ordained members in the TMU, past and present, are very supportive of the LMs. The senior members, most especially, are the ones who mentored the LMs and encouraged us to be in leadership roles. I am also grateful to my companions in the Coordinating Committee who always make themselves available especially at pressing times. In general, our trust among each other have developed over time and this is one factor that has been helpful for me to fulfill my role.

My initial months of participating in the Society's Zoom calls with other RMU leaders were also not easy for me. I was not confident in the discussions at first but I was able to adjust slowly through the encouragement from the other RMU leaders as well. The series of Zoom calls with the RMU leaders have prepared me in my participation at the IRMU Meeting. As I got to know them and as we shared about our own stories, we have somehow developed being concerned for one another. Meeting them in person was a blessing for me. I felt there was trust among many of us that we were able to be open in sharing about our stories of struggles and joy among each other.

From time to time I would ask God as to why He allowed me to take up this cross, and my faith helped me to understand and accept that being a coordinator is a privilege to offer myself in sharing God's mission in the ministry of leadership. It is always a humbling encounter being felt supported by the TMU members, the central leadership, and other Columbans in fulfilling my role as TMU Coordinator. Having a lay person and a woman as someone who represents the group may continue to be a challenge and many may still feel uncomfortable, not only the conservative ones but as well as within the Society. It took time before I could embrace the purpose of my role and the responsibilities attached to it. At the end of the day, it is all about giving oneself to share in doing God's mission by journeying together.

Submitted by: Sherryl Lou C. Capili  
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