

Annual Report for the Region of Ireland 2023

Introduction:

Since I presented the Annual Report at the IRMU last March not much has changed so this report is substantially the same. I have added my own reflection/insights on some of the issues which I as Regional Director feel need addressing.

As of today, the Region has a membership of ninety-three ordained, and one Lay Missionary. Forty-nine of the ordained are residents of Dalgan Park while twenty-five live outside of Dalgan either retired or on a pastoral assignment. There are nineteen permanent residents in the nursing home. Despite our age profile Columban Mission continues to be alive through the work of individual Columban's, and the Mission Office team, the Columban Centre in Dublin our support of the Migrant Centre, reaching out to migrants and refugees, IRD and ecology.

Morale/Spirit in the Region:

Despite the difficulties of age and health I believe the morale among the members is generally positive. For those living in Dalgan there is interest and engagement with the Dialogue Circles and zoom sessions in preparation for the up-coming General Assembly. The men like to be informed about what is happening in the Society on the local and international level.

Lay Mission & Columban Centre:

Unfortunately, Angie continues to be our sole lay missionary. This is due to the change in government policy regarding visas as they do not recognize the status of lay missionary. Visas are granted under two categories volunteer and religious minister, and these have a very narrow interpretation. This is truly unfortunate because the Region is open to lay missionaries being assigned here. While Angie is on her own, she continues to make a valuable contribution to Columban mission in the region. She has a very good network of friends who are her support group.

The Columban Center in Dublin provides a tremendous service for migrants and refugees. It is a center of hope and encouragement where they can drop in for a chat, a cup of tea, take English lessons or seek advice. Angie alongside our co-worker Michael O Sullivan and the Columban Sisters work with migrants and the Dublin City Interfaith Forum. The Interfaith Forum promotes discussion, prayer, hospitality, and participation in each other's major feasts/festivals. Interfaith workshops were given to schools and parish groups fostering an understanding and acceptance of the diversity of faiths. This element of solidarity between faiths is very important. In the coming months our presence in the field of IRD will be increased with the appointment of ordained Columban's working in this ministry.

MIGRANT RIGHTS CENTRE

The Migrant Rights Centre continues to be supported by the Society having been established by the Columban's in 2001. While there is no longer direct involvement with the centre Bobbie Gilmore and Michael O Sullivan are members of the board of directors. The membership of the region is very supportive of the Centre with a number making financial contributions to it. Those who come to the Centre seeking help are all welcomed, listened to and action taken on their behalf. In fulfilling the aim and nature of the Migrant Rights Centre we are supportive and play our part in welcoming and helping the stranger who comes to our shores.

Material Resources:

The greatest material resource that the Region of Ireland has is the land/farm. The land in a recent valuation has been valued at 7. Million euros, this is without the College building. The farm is now leased out and brings in an annual income of €169,000 per year. Other material resources are the properties in Maynooth and Donegal and Limerick. The Maynooth House plays an important role in the outreach to the Church in China hosting Chinese students during their studies in Maynooth.

The Role of the Mission Office

In recent months a team a team of ordained and lay have been on promotion in the archdiocese of Dublin. They have received a very good reception from the various parishes. They have been backed up by the dedicated Mission Office team. The office has a new manager who has brought her dedication and

enthusiasm to the job. We also have an ordained member on the team who looks after the letter writing and responds to those who request prayers or special attention. Many of our supporters are elderly so the mission office staff keep in touch with them through letters, phone calls, prayer booklets and keep them informed of the work of Columban's around the world. Working with just three staff members it develops and maintains these relationships through the Irish Mission League, the Far East magazine, the calendar, annual appeals and a constant exchange of letters, emails and phone calls. Every effort has been made to reach out to young people and to bring them on board, advances have been made through the website.

The Far East magazine faces the same challenge as all print media in finding a viable product in a time of evolving social media. Not surprisingly, online versions of the magazine do not seem to be attractive to our aging supporters. Perhaps the best we can do is to try to keep the printed version going as we try to develop viable alternatives. Currently we have an active support base of less than 20,000 people but their age profile tells us that we must seek support from the younger generation. The role of the Mission Office requires the staff to be familiar with Columban work and personnel across the world. It also demands that staff be alert to the relationships that exist between donors and Columban's living and deceased. This has become even more critical when there are few or no Columban's in office work any longer.

Safeguarding Note Annual Report

Together with the Safeguarding Committee, Sandra Neville continues to ensure the implementation of our Safeguarding Policy & Procedures in line with national legislation and best practice. The Regional Director & the Council have oversight of the work carried out by Sandra and the Committee. We endeavour to comply with the legislation in relation to Garda Vetting and the standards of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The College-Dalغان-Ecology:

Dalغان continues to be the home of forty-nine Columbans. It is a place of hospitality and welcome for visitors and Columban's alike. Over the summer months we had many overseas Columban's staying with us. A lot of effort and little expense has gone into making several rooms available for outside groups. Groups have been staying in these rooms and using the facilities for workshops, meetings and retreats. The house superior is constantly seeking new ways of

outreach so that Dalgan is still a base for mission. With these groups using the facilities it is generating income. Dalgan is also a centre for ecology and several times a year workshops are given by John Feehan which are very well attended. In recent years parts of the lawns have been allowed to grow wild encouraging biodiversity.

Conclusion and Areas of Concern:

Each IRMU is unique with its own strengths and challenges so I can only speak to my experience over the last six years as Director of the Region of Ireland. Here in Ireland, we now live in a highly regulated world. Compliance with the charity regulations/regulator and governance of the charity organization is demanded. The board can no longer consist of Columban's only but must have outside board members. As the Director is Chairperson of the board his role has become a lot more demanding and complicated. More and more I have come to rely on the expertise of professionals who do not come cheap. So much of my time is now taken up with administration. One solution is to hire a General Manager and while this will relieve some of the demands it will not elevate them. The present model of regional director relies too much on the one person in the role. Going forward this cannot continue, and a more collaborative leadership model will have to be found. If the director has a strong council who were active and willing to share the responsibilities it would make the position easier. The problem is people are elected on to the regional council who are not willing to do the work or take on responsibility. It is frustrating when people get elected for their personality and not their ability. Whoever is the director he will have to be able to work and relate with professional people. I believe at some stage of the formation process students should study business/governance structures, or at least have some exposure to this area.

In recent years it has become clear to me that perhaps our greatest contribution of the Region of Ireland is caring for the aging membership. With aging comes fragility and illness. Taking care of these elderly men, making sure they meet doctor and hospital appointments takes up a great deal of time and energy. Caring for these men is part and parcel of Columban Mission and is the top priority of the Region. I have come to see that preparing for retirement and eventual moving to the nursing home is very important. When the men have prepared themselves spiritually and emotionally the transition is much easier.

Concerns: As Dr. Evens Report has indicated we as a Society are facing some difficult decisions on several levels as it is clear we cannot continue as we are. The Region of Ireland has really one priority and that is to care for the aging membership. We are supportive of other groups and ministries. As a Society I believe need to read the signs of the times and from this choose one or two areas that will be our focus going forward for example IRD, care for the earth or migrants. All our resources go into supporting these ministries.

For me one of the big threats facing the Society is **individualism** where Columban's decided to do their own thing regardless of the needs of the Society and its mission. Perhaps if there was more collaborative teamwork and shared leadership then this issue could be addressed. Saying this I am not at all hopeful as the individuals involved will continue to do their own thing.

I wish to end this report by expressing my appreciation to all those Columban's, co-workers and staff who work to keep the flame of mission alive. I am grateful for the spirit of collaboration between our priests, lay missionary and co-workers who work tirelessly to promote the mission of the Society. I am eternally grateful.

Signed:

Rev. Raymond Husband
Regional Director