

Report from South America Region

Reports from RMU Leaders ought to reflect insights arising from your experience of leadership in your RMU within the context of the international Society and its mission.

It seems to me that the amalgamation of the Peru and Chile regions is not very effective in reducing administration, and to a great extent we continue working as two separate units. Maybe this is more my fault as Cathal, before me, made better efforts at having virtual meetings between the two countries, although this was during and coming out of the pandemic. The amalgamation also creates another layer of administration, the boundaries of which are quite opaque as regards the responsibilities of the local leaders, and unless the Director is involved in all areas issues can easily fall between the cracks. The sense coming out of the region, having recognized that the concept of an amalgamated Region is no longer viable, is that we should have two mission units, but with links through certain offices. For example, I think it important that we remain with one Bursar for both Chile and Peru, while also sharing the JPIC and Communication offices based in Santiago. This will leave the administration much more manageable for a younger member, in both countries, to assume with the support of all the members of the mission unit. By the year 2027 we will have 5 Columbans under 85 in Peru and 5 in Chile, that is if we don't receive any of the present FMAs who will be ordained by that time. So, for future leadership there will be very few to choose from, and impossible to form a local, or regional council.

Recommendation 1: MUs will encourage greater participation and co-responsibility.

Recommendation 6: With the responsibility lying more in the hands of the younger members they will be able to, with the support of the older members, present an image of the Columbans more in keeping with present day realities, and through the office of communications.

Retirement is a difficult topic to process as many emotions are linked to the subject, especially having spent a life time in a certain country. In our conversations there were no arguments against the idea of retirement to our home countries, but nobody was volunteering to do so either. It seems that every person will process their own return, whenever the correct time is for them unless the General Council specifies a policy for the whole Society. Failing that it's necessary to have all the information at hand in order to make the right decision, not only for oneself, but also for the Society.

Moving on the sale of properties has been an important part of our process during the last year. It took time to get everybody on board, although there are still one or two who don't agree, but now that we have achieved a consensus it is incumbent upon us that we move with this idea, and effectively reducing our costs enormously. Our budget will be cut by up to 50% with these decisions. There will be an initial financial outlay as we make ready the

houses that will serve as the new centre houses in Santiago and Lima, but these costs will be easily covered by the sale of the existing centre houses.

With the diminishment of our numbers, we will have to reduce our commitments accordingly. While the presence of co-workers is very important, I don't think the way forward is to keep employing more coworkers to cover all that the Columbans have been doing, unless they can become members of the Society. (More on this later) Rather, with the reduction of our commitments we can focus more on what we will give us live over the coming years. Letting go will be a very important part of this process of change, which shouldn't be seen as something negative, or undervaluing what we have achieved in the past, but freeing us to embrace a more uncertain future, which in turn will demand a greater faith in being participants in the Lord's Mission.

Recommendation 4: Co-workers are an important part of our mission. We should also keep encouraging local LMs to help us in our pastoral activities and mission.

We have two very important mission centres, Bobbio and CCEM, which I think will be more the focus of our mission in the coming years as our presence in the parishes decreases. In Bobbio (Chile) we have the regional JPIC and Communications offices, both of which work with our people in CCEM (Peru) to present an overall effort for the South America region. The migrant ministry, which is a huge problem throughout South America, receives migrants for a three-month period in Bobbio, and therefore, giving them time to find and secure other accommodation and at the same time a reliable income. There is also an outreach to migrants in various ways in Lima, which could prove to be a source of collaboration between Chile and Peru. This reality won't change in the near future, so I feel the Migrant ministry in Bobbio, and Lima, is of vital importance and outreach to the one of the most vulnerable communities. In CCEM we will continue to work as an outreach to the local church, and as in Chile, while our parish commitments decline, we will still have this contact with the local church to present different issues that are important to the local parishes, ecology, Francis' documents, space for our projects which promote other priorities of a social nature, etc.

Recommendation 2: If our mission centres are going to be the main focus of our missionary activities in the future, we suggest that JPIC continues as it is an integral part of the centres.

A hot potato continues to be Vocations. Some of us think that with little success in Peru and Chile, and the scarcity of formators, we shouldn't be thinking of carrying on. Continuing gives rise to an ethical problem, if we can't guarantee a life time on mission, then should we be doing it. Others, generally the younger members, feel that we should carry on, but with reaching out to a different population, that of university students. If the worst came to the worst, and we had no formators, we could use the local seminaries for formation and the students then could spend the weekends in Columban parishes, but

there will be few of them. If we close our vocations programme then we are without doubt suggesting to close the doors of the Society in the near future.

Recommendation 3: the present seminarians should be allowed to finish their studies and be ordained, but the question is should we continue with vocations after that. We are very split on the subject.

The thought of closing down wasn't very attractive for many, especially the younger Columbans and students who feel threatened by this idea, thus generating a very uncertain future. What can we do so that the younger Columbans and present-day students have more security? The prioritization of Regions/Mission Units will be necessary. Some RMUs will have to close. I suggest those which have no local Columbans like Pakistan and Japan. For other RMUs complete closure can't be considered as there are local Columbans, for example in South America we have Peruvian and Chilean Columbans who will always need a base, but perhaps no longer receiving more personnel, and then allowing us to focus on Asia with the personnel we have available.

Recommendation 5: With a smaller unit we can better encourage the younger members to assume responsibilities, especially as our commitments diminish we will be living and working in closer proximity.

As a Society we have to let go of the past way of doing things, while holding on to the wealth of our experience, which will allow us to evolve a new future. This means change from the top-down. Ted Dunn writes in his book, "Graced Crossroads", "Most communities, predictably, will "die by default" as a consequence of choosing the well-worn path of least resistance. Fear will be their primary driver, not faith or hope or love. Fear will be their downfall, preventing them from taking the types of bold actions required of transformation..." Therefore, a smaller General Council of three based in Rome, SG, VG and LM with the infrastructure in Hong Kong sold off, and possibly a person of contact for the General Council in Oceania, South America, and Ireland/Britain.

As the Columbans have a duty to look after the long term LMs is there some way that the Society can be re-constituted so that the long term LMs can become permanent members? That's why I suggest one long term LM be part of the General Council. Also, would it be possible that the long-term co-workers also become members? I don't know if this is possible in the Church, but with a Society of priests and laypeople we would have greater hope for continuing into the future. More often than not it is the lay people who are better suited to administrative roles and leadership.

Do we have to keep operating Society wide offices, but rather let whatever future focus we have arise from the local realities of the RMUs?

Recommendation 4: having the LMs/co-workers as permanent members will help cover the needs of leadership,

Child Protection Policy:

This year we have been waiting on the Society's Protection Policy so that we could model our own local policies around that. Now that we have the policy in our hands, and translated into Spanish, we have formed a team between Chile and Peru to be responsible for the elaboration of documents, in keeping with local laws and the Society document, and then present them to all the members of the region, including co-workers. We will be meeting for a day during the South American convention leading up to Columban's Day, as we will all be present, and then meetings by zoom to complete the work. Once we have a local policy then we will begin the formation and on-going education for all in the region. Adriana in Chile will be the person in overall charge of the team, along with Genovio, Cathal and Tony.