

RMU Responses to the External Report

Responses from all RMUs are in the document

British Region – GAPC answers

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

Our God is a “Big God”. The mission of Jesus is much larger than the society. The Columbans may not go on, at least not in our present form, but the MISSION will go on, and we can still contribute to that.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership? e.g. Dispense with Regions in favour of Mission Units? If so, how many places of Mission (single country) can be sustained? (Principal Report No. 109, 110)

Reduce number of RMU's, increase number of M.U.'s (maybe leaving each RMU to decide on "its own form/style of leadership" as there's no "one size fits all" solution"), perhaps reverse amalgamation as this seems to have "increased the burden on leaders", reduce number of ministry priorities (note: "many younger priests seem focussed on parish and pastoral ministry and....they have a right to lead on future priorities").

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for Mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

Expand "opportunities for L.M.'s, co-workers, volunteers to develop the skills and mission awareness they need", provide them with the chance to "experience mission and become immersed in the Columban charism", increase lay involvement in leadership and delegate important roles to laity wherever possible, maybe explore a "new vision" of a clerical/lay Columban mission

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

As "the future of the Society is not sustainable.....it is not ethical or practical to accept priestly vocations".

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

CLM must make its own decisions about its future, but statistics, trends and the "5-yr. suspension" decision seems to suggest that it will fade away in its present form. "The original idea...was to send people from the Local Church overseas for a short cross-cultural mission and then for them to return to their Local Church enriched. Perhaps we need to return to this", for instance, under the format of the SIM programme.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

Encourage all "RMU's to become financially independent" to reverse "lazy dependency on centrally generated funds"; "merging with another missionary society....could create more problems than it solves"; "our challenge is to use the time between now and 2036 effectively to foster and support new experiences of mission".

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

See above answers.

Feedback on the Principal Report from Chile

Background:

The Chilean “Principal Report” meeting was held on Tuesday 05th and Wednesday 06th of March, when the SA Director Tony Coney was visiting Chile. This means that Chile had already held its meeting and discussion on the Principal Report, before the GAPC email on March 08th with the 07 questions.

In Chile, 12 participants took part in the Principal Report meeting. 5 were non-native English speakers and 7 were native English speakers. In South America, in both Chile and in Peru, everything has to be translated into Spanish. All meetings, are conducted and presented in Spanish. The Principal Report is written in concise, academic English, using various sociological terminology and expressions. While this is essential, it also means that many if not most, of the 12 participants of the Chilean Columban community, both native and non-native English speakers would not read the Principal Report nor even the summary report.

Therefore, ahead of the meeting, Dan Harding sent each member of the Chilean Columban an email with a short summary of the different parts of the Summary Report and several questions to consider.

Discussion Questions at the meeting

1) What reduction in places of mission are members disposed to accept in order to prolong the life of the Society and thus developed more our missionary purpose?

In general, we could see no real benefit from reducing our places of mission. What was needed instead were changes to our “organizational structures”. Instead of withdrawing from places of mission, could we not regroup around different organizational structures such as mission units and be united into geographical groupings—such as those of the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania.

2) Which new and distinctive ministries would help to create a distinctive Columban identity, with an inspiring footprint, that is different from other congregations and ONGs?

We tried to think of new and distinctive ministries, that would create a defining Columban identity, different from others. While in South America, parish work in poor

areas is important, it is not the only type of ministry. Columban parish work needs to be more JPIC centred than diocesan parish work. It also needs to be complemented with other ministries.

We discussed Migrant Ministry. There is great scope for Migrant Ministry in Chile, either in the two Migrant Houses of Hospitality and advocacy work with migrant NGOs, as well as in our two large Columban parishes, which both have large migrant populations. The Columban parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesús in Alto Hospicio is around 80% migrant, being located near the point of entry for undocumented Latin American migrants coming through Bolivia. Many of the migrants live in shanty towns in this parish.

Instead of withdrawing from geographical RMU locations, maybe we can create new structures and groupings around important JPIC issues such as Migration, Climate Change –Biodiversity as well as an option for the poor in our parishes and migrant houses.

In South America, IRD is not an issue. At the same time, we recognize and value this important work in other RMUs.

3) New organizational models—canonical exploration. Regions or Mission Units? – just one country? ---role of coordinator? ---freeing up leadership roles?

In the South American Regional Convention in November 2023, we had already discussed in detail this issue and voted upon it. In our conversation we revised our voted upon and approved, organizational model up to 2030.

It is:

- a. 2024-2027---Continue as of now as the Region of South America.
- b. 2027-2030---Form the Region of the Americas which will have three districts, functioning along Mission Unit lines.
 - The District of Chile
 - The District of Perú
 - The District of the United States.

Each district will have a coordinator, who together with the other Coordinators will make up a Regional Council. The Coordinator Leader can alternate between countries and be the representative of the Americas on the General Council.

How is this model different from having three separate Mission Units?

Answer---The three separate districts will be united around common ministries, organized in grouping that meet regularly and plan and evaluate together via zoom.

Coordinated groupings will include---Migrant Ministry, JPIC—Climate Change and Biodiversity, Option and advocacy for and with the poor, parish ministry in poor, marginalized areas, vocations, ministerial and lay formation, on-going formation, Columban Lay Mission, SIM programme, fundraising and benefactors,

communications— (webpage, magazines, social media), common bursar and accounting department etc.

These grouping will form several different structures that need to be represented on the Regional Council.

4) What is your opinion about sharing roles of authority with the laity. ---widening leadership possibilities with the laity.

Columban Co-Workers already have important leadership roles in the South American region, such as that of the Regional Bursar, the Regional Communications Coordinator and the Regional JPIC Coordinator. Lay Co-Workers are also involved in the Migrant Ministry, in teams for the setting up Protocols of Protection, in mission education programmes and in the FMA and the SIM teams.

Columbans working in parishes in South America are used to working in close relationship with the laity in parish pastoral councils and other parish groups.

We all agreed that lay co-workers, as well as priest associates, FMA seminarians and SIM participants need to be represented on the Regional Council and participate in Columban meetings.

5.) What formal changes are we willing to make in South America and in Chile in particular in order to make the Columban footprint more sustainable, more attractive and more pertinent to the wider society? What changes are needed in the wider Society?

We all agreed with a new organizational model for the worldwide Society, whereby we withdraw from Hong Kong and have regional councillors representing the geographical regions of the Americas, Oceania, Asia and Europe. These councillors would meet several times a year, alternating at their different geographical localities. Other meetings will be done via zoom.

We all agreed that we should keep a minimum of parishes in poor, marginalized areas in both Chile and in Peru—Chile has three parishes at the moment, but one will soon be handed over and Peru has two parishes. At the same time, we all agreed that these Columban parishes should be distinctive from the surrounding diocesan parishes, with a stronger focus on Migrant Ministry and JPIC issues as well as co-responsibility with the laity.

We all agreed with the organizational model that we accepted at the Regional Convention of uniting the Region of South America with the Region of the United States, and forming three districts that cooperate closely and are integrated in several key areas.

6.) A sense of co-responsibility –especially for those under 65 years. How to help younger Columbans take more responsibility for a reconfigured Society.

Here, I expressed my personal opinion regarding the need for much more on-going formation. Often, younger members are so overwhelmed with work responsibilities and commitments, that they become tied down to the smaller, immediate parish type responsibilities without having any time to reflect on the bigger Societal picture.

On-going formation is necessary for the younger under 65 members to understand better what the Columban Society is, where are we heading, where should we place our energies and focus as well as reflecting on the wider societal and ecclesial issues.

The danger to me seems to be moving personal around to fill in gaps, like moving people around the chess board. It is as if all one has to do is celebrate Mass and the sacraments, no matter what the context is, no matter where one lives. The context is very very important.

It is my opinion that time must be given to on-going and continuous formation if we want the under 65s to get more involved and take more responsibility.

Mentoring and personal accompaniment is also very, very important for the younger Columbans. This needs to be built into the organizational structures.

People listened to my opinion without comment and appeared to agree. This was the only conversation.

=====

There seems to be some overlap with the 7 questions that the GAPC sent on March 08th.

1. We did not talk about the new face of God in a reconfigured Columban Society—question 1. Basically, we all seem to agree with Pope Francis that one encounters Jesus in the peripheries, both existential and geographical.
2. We dealt with a reconfigured Society, your questions 2 and 3, as can be seen above
3. Question 4---all of us felt that the Society should continue with vocations. In our Convention report, we have a detailed plan for vocations and formation in the South American region. This is a new plan and has never been tried before.
4. Question 5---Not having had CLM for several years now in the South American Region, means that Lay Missionaries can become out of sight and out of mind. Nevertheless, all of us are open to working in partnership with CLM and recognize many possibilities.
5. Questions 6---Visibility—The Society can sustain and grow itself more through becoming much more VISIBLE—through social media and other areas. We need to think hard and plan how this can happen.
6. Question 7---Individual Columban changes in own lives---Promoting VISIBILITY--take photos, write stories, show what we are doing.

Dan Harding

CMU Feedback to Questions from the GAPC

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

The new face of God is one of compassion and mercy, accompanying our Society among the poor and suffering on our wounded Earth. For us, Columbans, this face represents love, mercy, unity amidst diversity, joy, and hope in the world. We must be attentive to God not just in the Church but in the world, and continue to bring hope even with our decreasing numbers.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership? e.g. dispense with Regions in favour of Mission Units? If so, how many places of Mission (single country) can be sustained? (Principal Report No. 109, 110)

Changes in our organisational arrangements are needed. We need to create structures that are not dependent on canonical leadership. Mission Unit structures do not require canonical leaders. They do however require a Society delegate, who on behalf of the Society Leader, helps to attend to confidential personal matters of priest members in the Mission Unit. However, each country does not become a Mission Unit. Existing Regions would become a Mission Unit. E.g.: The Region of Oceania would become a Mission Unit. Ireland and Britain ought to come together to form one Mission Unit. TMU and CMU can discern coming together as one Mission Unit with new structures that best suit this new reconfiguration.

We need to reduce the number of countries where we are on mission. Japan has not received new personnel for over 20 years. In his report to GA2024 Tony Coney (Director of South America) writes: "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." Therefore, perhaps South America could also be considered as another Region that would not receive new personnel going forward. Perhaps present members in Japan, Peru and Chile could remain there if they are not needed elsewhere. Younger members in Peru/Chile could be young enough to learn a new language, if needed, to be assigned elsewhere. With this change, into the future we will be working in 12 countries rather than the present 15, and we will have eight RMUs rather than the present 12 RMUs.

Furthermore, the future Mission Units of Korea, Oceania, USA and Ireland/Britain will not receive new personnel except for members/LMs from these Mission Units being assigned there. These Mission Units will continue to provide financial resources for the Society. Going forward key

personnel in these Mission Units will be co-workers. Currently in Omaha and Melbourne, a large amount of administration is done by co-workers and staff.

So going forward only four Mission Units will receive FMA/newly ordained/new LM personnel, namely, Philippines, Myanmar, China/Taiwan, and Pakistan. Perhaps Fiji could be considered for new personnel because ordained and LM Pacificans are small in number thus new personnel might need to be assigned to Fiji to assist with Columban mission there rather than only relying on Pacifican Columbans being assigned there.

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

The experience in a number of RMUs in the Society with regard to employing lay personnel for key office roles has been very good. Perhaps we can create new roles of responsibility in the Society that allow for lay leaders/administrators to take care of as much work as possible that is traditionally done by RMU leaders. It would also be helpful to have specific possibilities put forward.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

The Society should continue to accept priestly vocations. We live with the reality of who we are and we let new candidates know who we are: that is, we are a small intercultural group of cross-cultural missionaries: priests, lay missionaries and co-workers.

CLM has recently stated that it will focus on ministries linked to migration and ecology. A similar approach can be considered for Columban priestly vocations. For potential candidates, focusing on a few mission priorities would help them to understand what is involved in a Columban vocation. It might also attract those who, before meeting the Columbans, seek to join a missionary society that is seriously involved in one of those highlighted ministries.

We may need to centralize the formation programme for all of the Society in one RMU. What the other RMUs can do is to have accompaniment programs. This can be a structure for both seminary and lay orientation programs.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

The premise of this question is not fully understood. It could be said that because CLM is under the umbrella of the Society it relies on leadership afforded by clergy in our present structures. The Society does not rely on 'leadership afforded by clergy' in order to do vocations work for CLM. LMs have been responsible for CLM vocations work for many years.

The CLM focus on migration and ecology has the potential to attract new candidates. This can be tried out now rather than pausing recruitment. With CLM numbers declining, there is a need to put more effort into recruitment before the numbers become even smaller.

We do not support the recommendation in the report from the recent CLM International Meeting that CLM postpone vocations work for 5 years. While recommending a postponement of inviting new vocations to CLM the report also says: "we will explore new ways of inviting people to Columban Mission." How can we 'explore new ways of inviting' without actually inviting?

In the past priests, Columban sisters and co-workers engaged in CLM vocations work which enabled the present LMs to join CLM. In fairness, some of the present LMs best give of their time to invite lay people to join CLM. Covid-19 Pandemic prevented CLM vocations work to take place from 2020-2023. We need to revamp CLM vocations again for at least six years and see what happens. In her report Dr. Evans says that we need to engage in 'vocations outreach' for the Society and CLM. We need to be pro-active in going out to seek vocations.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

We can sustain the Society, in whatever way it emerges going forward, by living the synodal way. We need to develop our partnership among ordained, LMs and co-workers. There are some countries where partnership has not worked. Sending new personnel to those countries is then not advisable.

We need to continue to focus our vocations work for Columban students in those countries where we have received new vocations over the past 10 years, that is, in the Philippines, Fiji (Pacific islands), Korea, Myanmar. We would also focus our vocations work for CLM in the same way, that is, in the Philippines, Fiji/Tonga, and Korea. We could also consider welcoming lay people in Myanmar to join CLM and have a Joint Sending Orientation Program for LMs preferably based in Manila.

We could also continue to welcome lay people to participate in our SIM programs: both short experiences as well as three to twelve months SIM volunteer experiences.

However, if vocation numbers continue to remain very low, smaller RMUs will gradually move towards closure or having minimal membership. Regions with mainly older members will move to a situation where care of those members is one of the Region's main tasks, something that will keep them closely connected to the families and friends of those Columbans, itself a worthy missionary contribution. While RMUs can be sustained by lay-leadership/co-workers/administrators, without sufficient vocations, the overall direction will be towards a managed and dignified closure.

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

Change is inevitable, with the possibility that Society closure will eventually take place. Even if we avoid closure, all of us will need to be led through a process that will help us to accept that a personal letting go is required by each of us so that the institutional change can emerge across the Society.

We need to be open to living our lives as Columban missionaries for the mission of the whole Society and not simply for our own individual mission interests. For priest members, we need to recall our oath of permanent aggregation and for LMs to recall our CLM agreement, and so be available for the mission of the whole Society and be ready to be assigned/appointed appropriately by the Society Leader and our RMU Leaders. We are also called to an ongoing commitment to our 'way of being on mission', that is, partnership among all Columbans: priests, students, lay missionaries and co-workers in a spirit of mutual respect, responsibility and accountability.

Region of Ireland Response to Review Questions

1. What is the new face of God for the Columban's in our times?

In our various discussions this question was not addressed as it was felt the answers would be too broad with each Columban having their own image of the Face of God.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

As with all of these questions there was not a uniformity of answers. However, going forward there was a strong feeling that the mission unit was the favoured model. This would facilitate lay leadership and greater integration. Places like Ireland because of the large numbers would remain a Region with the priority being to care for the sick and elderly. For mission units to work best then smaller numbers of ordained, lay and co-workers would facilitate this. The decision-making method should be the synodal model. Perhaps the key question is to clarify what the aim and nature of the Society is? We need to reaffirm what is the core of our identity as The Missionary Society of St. Columban.

3.What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for Mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

The present Society structure is unsustainable and therefore there must be a drastic reduction in in our priorities and commitments. All of our discussion groups were in agreement that we should have two core commitments which should not be country/RMU's based but Society based. We need to shift from country based to priorities based. The emphasis of the Society should be to supporting these two priorities. A number of suggested priorities were made with IRD and Climate concerns being the top two.

- a) IRD
- b) Climate concerns
- c) Migrants/refuges
- d) JPIC
- e) China
- f) Myanmar/Pakistan

A majority showed themselves to be in favour of having a limited set of priorities.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

Vocations for the Columban's from the Western World has long faded. However, in countries where there are still vocations resources should be put into fostering them. Younger Columban's especially should spend some time in the vocation's ministry. The whole area of dual incardination needs to be explored. The length of time spent in formation was a cause of concern for some. They see 10 years as way too long and new possibilities should be explored which will reduce the length of time a student spends in formation. Many agreed that to decide to stop taking candidates was equivalent to deciding to close the Society down. However, it was also said that, if we don't take radical steps now to ensure that there will be a viable Columban mission in ten years' time, then closure of the Society will inevitably be on the agenda. So, if we want to continue our vocations program, we must take those steps now.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

While the recent decision by the lay missionaries to focus on two key priorities was applauded by many the decision to stop recruiting new lay missionaries for 5 years was seen as the death knell of the lay mission program so the question is irrelevant.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

If there are no further vocations, then how will it be possible to grow the ordained membership? This question is also irrelevant. Closure does not necessarily mean defeat. If it is going to be a reality, then we plan for that in an orderly way.

Raymond Husband

Region of Ireland.

15th April 2024

JMU Response to the External Report

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

The Face of God is the reality of our world today: Wars, Conflicts, Gap between the Rich and Poor countries, Migrant workers, Climate Change, Richness of Cultures, Languages, Religions, Foods, Music, Smell, Colorful... We can learn about God through listening. What is God saying? There is a sacrifice to be made in becoming intercultural. We can share our own experience of God; respecting for all faith responses in the world as they too search for the Face of God. The Multicultural Face of God...New Face of Mission...

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership? e.g. *Dispense with Regions in favor of Mission Units? If so, how many places of Mission (single country) can be sustained? (Principal Report No. 109, 110)*

All Regions should turn themselves into Mission Units, with shared responsibilities for leadership, for administration, for assignments and for finances. Each non-retired Columban should take responsibility for the whole Columban mission as well as for their own ministry. In this way what has been considered full time leadership and administrative positions become part-time, and do not require missionaries to forgo their own mission activities. In countries with less than a quarter of Columbans in active ministry compared to 20 or 30 years ago, these positions are no longer fulltime. No country needs to be closed down simply because old structures can no longer be maintained. A corollary of this is that there will be significant financial savings as well.

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for Mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

See above. With part-time clerical leadership, we will need to work with co-workers for Society work, but not just to replace current position in current structures.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

This should be decided on a county by country basis. This is not a numbers game, and we do not need to run seminaries. Many small congregations have small effective formation programs.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

Again we would delegate this to the Lay Mission Leadership team, after all we want to engage with Lay leadership, and to ensure all Columban members share in responsibility for leadership, for administration, for assignments and for finances. Let us not make a decision for them beforehand.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

There is no way we can stabilize or grow the ordained membership. But this is not an aim for the Society. Our aim is for cross-cultural mission, and if there are others inspired by the Spirit who wish to join in, let us welcome them.

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

Refer to our response to question 2.

(Leo Schummacher & Nguyen Xuan Tien)

General Assembly - Principal Report Group Sharing

Korean Region

Discussion took place on Day 1 of our Regional Assembly. 21 Columbans (members and LMs) were in attendance for this session. After hearing a short input on the key points of the Evans

Report, the approach was to combine the 7 questions under 3 themes and discuss them in small groups. The Themes were 1) Our Columban Identity 2) Leadership & Society Structure 3) Vocations.

Our Columban Identity

Here the groups were chosen on a random basis simply by counting off 1-4 and the 4 groups come together according to number. Two Questions were give for Reflection:

Q1. What is the new face of God in our times

Group 1: There is only no one face of God, but diverse faces - the face of God that is found outside religion; in the face of suffering and poor people, a tired but compassionate God.

Group 2: In the face of the suffering and the poor; a Church that goes out there; in cooperation; in the diversity of ministries; in new callings

Group 3: In the face of the marginalized people; in the refugees, migrants and those who are exiled from their homeland; in the poor people.

Group 4: Maintaining our original identity is important. However, it is also crucial to have the flexibility to continuously change according to the flow of the times, and to possess the openness that allows for this. Therefore, the new face of God that we encounter today could perhaps be described as an open mind.

Q2. What change might we Columbans make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the society?

Group 1: Older Columbans will support the institutional changes and allow the younger Columbans to carry out the implementation of these changes; openness to change.

Group 2: Changes that can be carried out - move towards a Synodality model.

Group 3: Go down from big ideas to small ideas

Group 4: While all aspects of our identity as a Foreign Missionary Society presented at the Constitutions and Directory are important, it is preferable to select one that suits our current reality and concretely implement it. Moreover, this choice should be made by the younger members. In making such a decision, we look forward to the potential of change in a structure that allows the passion for mission held by the young members to be shared.

Theme II: Leadership & Society Structure

This time the grouping was decided by age bracket: (a) 65 yrs old and above (b) 51 to 64 years old (c) 50 years old and below. In each category there were 7 members in each group!!!

Questions for Reflection:

Q3. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership? E.g. dispense with Regions in favour of Mission Units? If so how many places of mission

Group 1 (50 years old and younger)

- How do these questions affect leadership? They have more affect on the structure? How does the Korea region prepare a transition from an ordained bursar to lay bursar?.
- The leadership team has to have a deep understanding of our vision and identity.
- More proactivity between personnel (co-workers) and members of the Society.
- Can we change the Region to MU for lay people to be involved more in the leadership role? Is there real willingness from younger Columbans to take on leadership role?

Group 2 (51 years old to 64)

- There are going to be small numbers in every place and how to organize themselves must to be left to a small group; In terms of how many places of mission, a maximum 3 and should be decided by the younger members of the society.

Group 3 (65 years and older)

- Mission Units are less demanding on leadership; they also not patriarchal and allow women coordinators.
- But what if a group prefer small region? Let the group decide. But if the numbers are small it cannot function as region.
- Why not just have units with contact person to relate to Central Leadership? E.g. Philippine Missionary Society model.
- Maximum 3 places of Mission where personnel are assigned: Peru, Pakistan, Myanmar; other RMUS would be RMUs supporting "Mission RMUs" with personnel and finance.

Q4. What can be done in reconfiguring Society

Group 1 (50 years old and younger)

- Reduce structure to four areas: Europe, America, Asia, Oceania? Combine CA with CLT – only one leadership team? Major change in the Constitutions.

Group 2 (51 years old to 64)

- The new configuration now in Korea, lay is taking place now and co-workers have to be invited to the meeting and discuss things with us.

Group 3 (65 years and above)

- Invite in our co-workers to all meetings where missions be discussed. Lay people are leaders in the field of their expertise.

Theme III: Vocation Issue

Groups were divided by Nationality: (a) Irish & NZ Group (b) Korean Group (c) Multi-national Group. While there were 3 questions for reflection the groups dealt with them under the theme of 'Vocations'

Q5. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

Q6. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

Q7. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

Group 1 (Irish & NZ)

- The same answer to all 3 questions! People join a missionary group, and then later, if they want to be ordained, they apply and if accepted will enter that programme. So people trained as missionaries first. Shorten the length of initial formation. It would cut down the need for staff. It opens the chance for people who want to become a missionary or be ordained. So Recruit Missionaries.

Group 2 (Korean Group)

- Vocations development requires an awareness that 'Vocations' are one part of the mission. Therefore, not engaging in vocations means giving up on the mission. Of course, we do not deny the social phenomenon that there is a decline in vocations. Nevertheless, we need to reflect on whether we are afraid to shift our gaze to many places where vocations are continuously being developed.

Group 3 (International Group + LMs)

- Our mission is God's mission. Closing down vocations means no future for the Society. We should open to the people who want to join our vocation and formation program. The questions came across as negative.

MMU Response to the External Review

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

We are not sure if God has a new face for us. It was expressed that returning to our roots and a renewal of our commitment to the Purpose and Spirit of the Society as expressed in the first two chapters

of our Constitutions would help us once again see the face of God. This would help us re-engage with the spirituality of the Society that is expressed there. God is a God of reconciliation. We are like a small candle whose light gets brighter the darker the situation is. What inspired us to originally join the Missionary society of St. Columban? In that we will see the face of God. Some expressed the idea that the Face of God didn't change but that there are new challenges for us to face. God's face is close to us but it may be difficult for us to see as our vision is clouded by our modern lifestyle. Over all there was a sense of being called to recommit to our missionary spirituality and simplicity of lifestyle.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

Empowering real lay leadership and more collaboration with the local church. We realise that the number of places of mission will have to be reduced. We believe one of the main criteria for continuing a mission would be the realistic possibility of getting vocations. The traditional home regions administration would be led by professional lay people and would be in service of the areas where Columbans are still on Mission.

3. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

Some congregations now employ Lay people to manage the congregation while a sister or cleric is superior of the members. We need to allow Lay professionals to take ownership of their role of leadership in the society.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

This is a strange question. Is there some indication that the Society is going to engage in illegal or ethically unsound practices in order to get vocations? We are strongly not in favor of suspending the vocations promotion program. We feel we are still at the beginning of vocation promotion in Myanmar. The report highlights the reality of declining numbers and the impossibility of maintaining our present

operation as it is. The report is an academic exercise and, as such, is valuable. However it has to be viewed with the eyes of faith. And our response has to be rooted in, and emerge from, that faith. It is not important that the society prolong its life, however it is important that the society remain faithful to the nature and purpose and spirit of the society as outlined in the constitutions. To remain faithful to that we need to offer, to young people, life in the missionary Society of Saint Columban as a way to follow Jesus and become holy. It was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that led the society to seek vocations in some of the areas where we worked. It would be unconscionable and a grave injustice to those who have joined us from those areas to shut it down. We are looking forward to continuing our efforts at vocation promotion in Myanmar.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

The international conference of the CLM was split about whether to continue to seek LM vocations. The recommendation of the CLT to suspend vocation promotion for 5 years seems like a decision to close CLM, but without actually saying it. We are against this recommendation. If a short time is needed (1 or 2 years) to review CLM then take it but 5 years of “naval gazing’ is hardly a missionary option. We do not really understand in what way vocations for CLM “rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy.” Partnership and collaboration are certainly involved and we hope this will continue.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

Our present age structure makes it impossible for us to stabilize or grow the ordained membership if we take the whole membership into consideration. The members over 65 would be dying at a rate that makes it impossible to have ordinations to meet the death rate. If we take those who have been ordained by the newer programs, then the numbers of ordained are actually increasing. With a

concentration on 4 or 5 mission areas, with 2-3 ordinations a year and with ongoing collaboration with Lay Missionaries and professional lay coworkers. the society can remain on mission for a long time into the future.

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

We are willing to embrace whatever new structures and ideas for mission emerge. We are happy to be part of that decision making process. The voices of younger Columbans from the “New” vocation programs should be listened to carefully. We all expressed a willingness to respond positively to taking up roles that are in the service of Columban Mission.

Region of Oceania

Concerning Reflection on the External Review

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

There were various responses to this question with some similar ideas.

The face of God is Jesus Christ. So, it is a merciful and compassionate face reaching out with love to everyone especially to the poor, those on the margins of society and those who are struggling for life – physical, mental and spiritual. It is through God’s word that we “see the face of God”, each other and invisible things.

The face of God is the person of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) who reveals our God as the Loving Abba. It is the face of God in the peoples among whom we have lived our Columban missionary lives. It is the “*suffering faces of the Lord*” (Puebla CELAM III Final Document) in the poor, the marginalized, the indigenous, workers and unemployed. The face of God includes all of creation with the natural environment, our “Common Home”. It is “the cry of the earth” inter-connected with humanity and especially the poor and marginalized.

The new face of mission is “outwards facing”. In the past, mission has been very ecclesio-centric. The first generations of Columbans went overseas to establish the church – they were the ‘church’. Mission in the last century was very self-referential. It was basically centripetal. The church reached out, but only to draw in.

What is mission today, to which all the baptised are called? And what is the specific Columban missionary charism within that general call to mission? Mission today is turning outwards to society (as promoted by Pope Francis). Mission is no longer centripetal, self-referential, drawing people into an ecclesial orbit. It is essentially *centrifugal*. It is going out from the centre, out from the church. It is Kingdom-oriented. It is being ‘out there’ among the people, engaging in the burning issues of today e.g. justice, multiculturalism, peace, migration, interreligious dialogue, environment, climate change ... The new face of God is compassion, mercy and kindness. It is inclusion, participation and communion. We are all in it together. It is universal solidarity/fraternity/sorority. It embraces all people and all creation.

Columbans are a public face of church mission as followers of Jesus the Christ. In our times, mass media and communication is professional with wide impact. In this milieu, a public face of Columbans needs to be equally effective in communicating a message about how God is present with humanity on earth.

Robert F Schreiter spoke of Reconciliation as a new paradigm for mission. He included various items, including care of creation among examples of reconciliation required. Reconciliation would seem to be a new face of God for the Columbans in our time. Peter J. Phan (University of America) puts “Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church”, and this is done by way of proclamation using the four dialogues vz life, action, theological exchange and religious experience.

The new face of God reminds us of our Baptism, to stand before the Holy Spirit, and to remember the marginalized and vulnerable, social justice and creation. It is also embracing diversity and fostering compassion across cultures and religions.

God is with us, challenging us, calling us to trust, to be open and courageous, but also to be imaginative. The new face of God is accompanying, not distant; listening, not dictating from on high; loving, not judging; gently revealing, not rigidly condemning; indwelling, not communicating from on high.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

There were various responses to this question with no overwhelming support for any one suggestion.

The primary places of mission would be best structurally served by Mission Units because they call for more co-responsible participation in the work of mission. They are also more suitable for synodal communion, participation and mission. Three countries of primary mission could possibly be sustained. Some other countries, where the potential exists, would be needed for vocations and finances. Columbans in those countries, supplemented by co-workers, lay missionaries and companions in mission, would continue as missionaries but they would not expect or receive young missionaries, who would go to the primary places of mission.

We need to create structures that are not dependent on canonical leadership. With our reducing membership, we only need one Major Superior – the Society Leader and the members of his

Council. This organizational arrangement will create space for more flexible and appropriate structures. We need to send FMA students, newly ordained and new LMs to only three or four places of mission. In the future they may go on rotation to their country of origin for missionary work.

We have reduced the number of Regions by forming the new Regions of Oceania and South America. Can more of that be done in Asia, for example? Another suggestion is that the Region of Oceania be terminated, to be replaced with three self-administered Mission Units in Fiji, Aotearoa and Australia.

There is support for Mission Units, but dispensing with all Regions in favour of Mission Units is utter madness. If you have imperfect structures but there is goodwill among the Columbans, the goodwill will carry you over the whatever 'potholes' there may be in the structures; but if you have perfect structures but ill-will among the Columbans, the ill-will will drive you down the tiniest crack and cause you to stumble. Structures are secondary. What is most important is the spirit among the Columbans. Work on the spirit first, and the structures will follow in due course. Work on the structures first, and the Columbans will become dry bones! It is the spirit that gives life, not the law!

Mission Units give more flexibility, more participation, but they are not the panacea for the whole Society. Mission Units can and do work well for smaller numbers, but they are not great for the larger numbers we have in some present 'older' Regions. Mission Units incorporate greater participation, which is good synodality, but not everybody needs to, nor should do, everything. There is confidentiality about some personnel issues with which leaders must deal. There are some matters that are proper to members of the Society. And there is also a need for subsidiarity, an appropriate division of labour. Even synodality has "decision makers" and "decision takers".

Rather than every Region becoming a Mission Unit, it would be much better off investing our limited time and energy into culling and/or combining some of our present RMUs and making them *better*, especially, making them more synodal. In that way, we will get the best of both worlds. Better participation by all (a la Mission Unit), with appropriate division of labour (a la Region).

The future of the ordained Columban ministry in Australia is an aged care home, while Columban mission will be carried into the future by the co-workers at the Columban Mission Centre in Essendon with some remote supervision from Columban leaders overseas. New Zealand is the same. It will probably be the same in some other Regions/areas. And the result of this regional structure is recycling elderly Columbans into leadership.

Our Regions are based on the 19th century shipping between geographical countries. To catch up with the times, we need to develop "virtual Regions" based not on geography but on the internet. COVID has taught us that this is possible. If the Society is to be re-founded, it will most likely be by Columbans, men and women, ordained and lay, in their 30s and 40s, not by ageing men in their 70s and 80s.

Albert Einstein said: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." That requires *new thinking*. It requires *new personnel*. The previous generation of Columbans needs to get out of the way. The next generation of Columbans needs to take up the leadership.

Some provocative suggestions:

- Assign all retired Columbans in one ‘online’ “Retirement Region” while they continue to live in different geographical locations.
- Put the traditional ‘home regions’ of the past, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Ireland, Britain, USA in one Region. They all have a similar demographic and similar issues. Different time zones is highly problematic.
- Alternatively, combine new RMUs *along* international time zones e.g. Aotearoa New Zealand and Fiji; Australia, Japan, Korea; Philippines, China, Taiwan etc.
- More radically still, create “virtual” RMUs, based on apostolates rather than geography or time e.g. fundraising for mission, mission promotion through publications, interfaith relations, working with migrants, vocations. According to Lonergan, community is not proximity, but common experience, common understanding, common judgement, and common response. Community is a psychological reality, a social construct, not a geographical one. Could new models of RMUs be fashioned accordingly?

Empower more participation of young ordained and co-workers to take on leadership roles and responsibilities with appropriate training and resources. One way to show commitment to developing leaders is to provide them with opportunities to grow. Distinguish between leadership and administration and spread administration among the laity and priest members.

This is a pragmatic organisational issue and will depend on evolving defined but interim Society aims. This means having clear aims for Society work that is distinct from general church mission in baptism. It demands more than *rearranging chairs on the Titanic* for the sake of self-preservation.

One congregation of priests in Australia has the “Superior General’s Delegate” whereas before they had a Provincial. Presumably he reports directly to the Superior General. In Australia we have the Emerging Futures Collaborative Limited (EFCL) which accepts the responsibility to put in place appropriate governance and management initiatives for religious institutes moving towards completion.

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangement for mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

There were various responses to this question.

The question is phrased oddly. It gives the impression that there is a Columban entity that engages with lay leadership. Surely the reality is that lay leadership is already running Columban apostolates e.g. fundraising, mission promotion. It is simply a matter of extending this.

It is wasting precious time and energy trying to get all the arrangements sorted out in terms of canon law and constitutions. We Columbans function better by being ‘missionary’, by *doing it*, by living out new ways of being in relation, lay and ordained, with other church and secular agencies, with followers of other religions, rather than trying to legislate it. Live it out first and the structures will follow in due course. To try and write new constitutions and solve the canonical issues at this point is vastly premature. It would be like drawing a map without ever having seen where we are going! As Pope Francis has said, “it is not just an era of change, but a change of era”. So let’s live into this new era, and work on the structures later in the light of our lived experience. As was said in the past, no point in putting the cart before the horse!

Adopt the present practice of Mission Units in which both lay missionaries and priest members have been assuming leadership as practiced in the TMU and MMU for many years. Co-workers can then engage more in leadership. For the past 6 years the CLMCLT Coordinator has been the LM delegate to the General Council as recommended by GA 2018. We could possibly expand this to include a co-worker.

Key lay co-workers should be a part of Society leadership (except in personal matters concerning ordained Columbans) especially where the expertise is important to the functioning of the whole Society or its individual units. They should have a solid orientation to the charism, history, values, mission and ethos of the Society.

We as Columbans require some in-depth formation-workshops in the Theology/Formation of the Laity. There are still many “signs” of clericalism (at times unconscious but latent), and the engaging in an hierarchical model of prioritizing and undertaking ministries, apostolates and the “institutional” administration and running of things. We require more ongoing formation on synodality, and open conversation so it would be more possible to work and put into practice a more synodal model of leadership that includes lay people in collaboration and co-responsibility.

We need to recognise the gifts in others. Some people are naturally outgoing and will volunteer to lead. To cultivate lay leadership requires another person to notice and draw attention to another’s gifts and potential gifts. This takes some discernment – both on the part of the person noticing the gifts, as well as the individual who may have the gifts. To really cultivate lay leadership, there has to be a willingness to be in relationship. Lay leaders need to have someone they can trust to give them feedback and to help them process their experiences. These people might even serve as mentors to them.

It is important we respect the lay leadership of any group we work with. Within the Society it is more difficult. Some congregations have set up organisations outside their canonical bodies to partake of their work without treading on canonical toes. One such example is the Public Juridical Person (PJP). Within in the Society, an alertness s needed as to when we can promote lay leadership e.g. chair of committees even though a Columban be on that committee. We need to be accepting of being outvoted when on a mixed committee of laity and Columbans. To what extent cultural issues enter in this question needs thought.

To have lay leadership within the Society by rights, its constitutions will have to be changed but makes it a different institution. The current constitutions means lay leaders can be employed for their professional expertise and to exercise designated leadership roles in the Society, but this does not make them members.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

There were various responses to this question.

It is difficult to fully comprehend the meaning of this question. Our present approach to vocations is canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical. We are not aware that seeking vocations has a ‘secularly legal’ nature to it. We already let new candidates know we are a small intercultural group of cross-cultural missionaries crossing boundaries of country, language and culture.

The Society should continue to seek vocations. Perhaps we should be more proactive seeking to “recruit” helping the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Nguyen Van Hung and Nguyen Xuan Tien could be asked about whether the Society should seek prospective seminarians in Vietnam as Australian bishops do and one religious order of men does.

The majority of Columbans must see themselves as vocation promoters. The Vocation Director should work with a team. The places where there seem to be the best possibility of receiving vocations should be targeted and a comprehensive plan developed e.g. in the Pacific, Vanua Levu (Fiji), Tonga and Kiribati. Ongoing contact should be made with Apostolic and devotional groups. Some volunteers e.g. Columban companions who are teachers and catechists should be recruited as vocation promoters. Good social media presentations, video clips from the missions and short Come and See sessions should be developed and used. A good accompaniment program, regularly reviewed, should be in place.

Invite men and women to join us in mission and to give all the same preparatory training for setting out on mission. Send on mission all who wish to go and are seen as suitable by the formation team. Invite those who seem suitable for the priestly ministry to train for such.

Eliminate the job of vocation director and ask those on mission to invite those they may deem suitable to apply to the local RMU leadership for entry into the initial formation program, be it part time or full time. Also, advertise in Columban mass media or through a local diocesan structure.

We need to recreate a culture favourable to different vocations and to help guide young people toward making decisions for their future.

The Society can adopt the MEP system of dual incardination. This opens a future for a priest to exercise a public church face of mission and belong to a recognised clerical structure for priestly pastoral work.

One person is of the opinion that we should not continue with formation beyond the present group of seminarians who are in formation currently.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

There were various responses to this question.

It is difficult to fully understand the premise to this question. One might say that because Columban Lay Missionaries (CLM) is under the auspices of the Society it relies fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy according to our present structures. However, the Society does not rely on leadership afforded by clergy to promote vocations to CLM. LMs have been responsible for promoting CLM vocations for more than 20 years.

There is little support for the recommendation in the CLM International Meeting Report to suspend the LM Vocation Promotion, Accompaniment, Come and See and Orientation Programs for 5 years. While recommending a postponement of inviting new vocations to CLM, the report also says: “During this period, we will explore new ways of inviting people to Columban mission.” How is it possible to explore new ways of inviting people without inviting people? There seems to be a contradiction here.

We are mindful of the many Columban priests, sisters and co-workers who in the past generously gave of their time to promote vocations to CLM and many of our present LMs are on mission today because of these efforts. Now is the time for some of our more experienced LMs to be generous

with their time to do CLM vocations work. Covid prevented CLM vocations work for three years. Last year, CLM vocations promotion began again in the Region of Oceania and there are six young people in our accompaniment program. The former Regions of Fiji and ANZ were the first to have a Joint Sending Orientation Program for LMs. We need a Joint Sending Orientation Program for LMs preferably in Manila.

Returned lay missionaries can be the best promoters of lay mission vocations. They should be invited to share their experience and mentor any qualified young person who shows interest. It should also be a team ministry. The assistance of an ordained member, as a member of the team, would be an advantage. Social media approaches also need to be developed.

The overall appreciation of CLM over the years has not been so positive in Peru for example where the Region has not received LMs for a number of years, choosing instead to focus on the promotion and formation of Peruviana “on mission” within Peru.

One person believes that if CLM has suspended recruitment for 5 years, the Society should respect that. Another person thinks the Society lay mission effort should cease. Lay mission church organisations currently exist to which Columban lay missionaries could transfer where they would be full members. Society underlying aspirations more than four decades ago presumed the possibility of preparing for married and single, male and female priests but it never happened.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

Local co-workers or Companions in Mission, particularly if well formed in Columban mission spirituality and willing to be full time or devote a regular part-time portion of their time to working with Columbans, could supplement ordained Columban missionaries. Lay co-workers can also take care of many administrative matters.

We need to continue to find ways of sharing missionary responsibility with lay Christians. If vocations to the priesthood are almost or completely non-existent, discern ways forward that rely totally on lay missionaries and co-workers.

We need to live the present moment and face the future with trust and courage and keep the “flame and light” of mission burning through creative witness and promotion. This will entail courageous decision taking re: priorities e.g. JPIC, IRD, promotion of the Synodal Missionary Church (the “dream” of Pope Francis).

Lay people need to be encouraged to take leadership training on how to reach out to connect with people of other religions to sustain the mission work. Also to promote and focus on deepening of faith and spirituality. Vocation is a call and the mission belongs to God.

We are certainly not the only Catholic Church group experiencing these challenges. Are there others we can learn from?

One person does not accept that this point of our decline has yet been reached. From 2023 figures we would seem to have about 60 priests and students under the age of 60. A further decline in overall numbers is inevitable. Without questions 2 above being faced, the Society structures and ministries will not be sustained.

One person states that diocesan priest numbers are falling so the Society has no pool to draw upon. As a Society of secular priests, the Society needs to read the sign of the times and disband in its current form.

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

There were various responses to this question.

We need to be more willing to think about the overall Society rather than only about our own particular ministry. Be willing to commit to an agreed purpose suitable to the world and to the Society of Columban at this time. Commit our talents to the good of the Society and its mission. Give witness to a life transformed by the Resurrected Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We are called to an ongoing commitment to our way of being on mission, that is, partnership among all Columbans: priests, students, lay missionaries, priest associates, co-workers and companions in mission.

Cease to promote the idea that priests are special. Include non-ordained in all aspects of Columban life and develop a culture of equality among all who, in some way, choose to share Columba Mission.

There needs to be more open conversation, respectful listening, prayerful discernment and courageous decision taking. An acceptance of transformation and letting go. We are constantly faced with concrete circumstances and challenges to “accept, adapt and advance” and hopefully live the “Joy of the Gospel” no matter what our age or actual situation.

We are baptised into Christ; we have put on Christ; the Eucharist is both the summit and source of our Christian life. As the source, the Eucharist is there for all Columban priests, LMs and co-workers (in accordance with their vocation from God) to be other Christs. “Do this in memory of me” refers not only to the Last Supper but also the Passion and Death of Jesus. “What shapes our actions is our spirituality.” (Ron Rolheiser). Paul VI in *Evangelii Nunciandi* wrote that modern people listen to witnesses rather than to teachers and then to teachers if they are witnesses.

One person wrote the best contribution at this stage of my Columban missionary life is to ‘complete’ my present apostolate as a best I can by handing it over to the local diocese where it may have an enduring future. I am happy and commit to support other younger Columbans in taking the Society forward in ways that suit them and enable a future different from what I have lived.

Another says at my age (almost 82) there is not a lot of change that I can make in my life and ministry, but I am called to be interested, supportive and faithful.

One person says Columbans should indicate what institution they would like to transfer to in preparation for when the Society disbands – another mission group like the SVDs or Jesuits. Laicization with a financial package should be an option.

One person suggests that the benefits that the LMs receive from the Society can be allocated to help the Society financially.

Collated by Peter O’Neill

18 April 2024

Peruvian Response to the GAPC Questions

Greetings from Peru, Hope things may be well with you. Here are my Peruvian short responses to the questions you sent to us. I hope they may contribute in something.

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

In response to this first question, our Peruvian Columban group pointed out several faces about God but the face which may summarize most of them is the face of the poor, in the poor we find the true face of God speaking to us.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

Our group emphasized mission unit and district too in collaboration.

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for Mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

In response to it was to continue to empower the lay to play a good role in every undertaken task in the Church and in the full Society.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

Our response was to continue to take vocations, but to join other congregations' groups formation programs with the same affinities. For example, in the formation program of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart in Lima is a Carthusian seminarian. In Peru ISET is a common inter congregational theological center for philosophical, and theological studies.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

Our group agreed to continue forming only local lay missionaries.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

Without vocations is impossible to stabilize and to grow

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

Some members responded continuity in doing ministry in the same way we are doing now. A second group shared the contribution of their talents experience in chiropody, reflexology and doing music as a pastoral ministry.

(From Gabriel Rojas on behalf of the Peruvian Group)

PHILIPPINE REGION FEEDBACK ON THE EVANS/PRINCIPAL REPORT:

1. What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

- God of creation: nature, human
All things in the universe are included: inclusive
- If you want to know God, understand His creation (diverse expression of God's creativity; God is one and we are many images of God; God is with us, take courage – Joshua 1:19)
- The God who trusts and accompanies us wherever we decide to go; the God of light who guides us; the God of hope who encourages us; the God who works in strange ways
- Face of God ->JPIC/IRD ministries especially indigenous religion
- The new face of God for the Columban Society is Myanmar, Philippines, Korea, Fiji, Peru and Chile
- Diverse components, inclusive face of God (ordained, LMs, co-workers, nationalities); an ALL-EMBRACING God. What was the old face of God for the Columbans?
- Intentional and intercultural society/community responding to the ecological and climate crisis in a health and just way
- Face of God →Emerging

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

- Following synodal spirituality, we have shared leadership, developing ownership and obedience
- Mission units instead of Regions. Mission Unit that is sustainable and self-sufficient; with “come and see” as an invitation to Columban Mission, broadening our personnel extending it to the mission partners
- A movement towards more Mission Units with possibility of Lay Leadership
- Small mission unit structure; only one joint area meeting

- To reduce the demands on clerical leadership, we can maintain the central leadership team and shift from Regions to Mission Units where coordinators will take the leadership role (ordained or lay missionaries)
- Closure of some RMUs (to be identified; amalgamation of RMUS ->8-10 sustainable places of mission (single countries)
- Affirm, add, and alter our present structures as we are doing in the Philippines in the service of the crisis (ecological and climate)
- Region Unit → Mission Unit

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for Mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

- Evaluating the partnership with lay leadership. Widen our idea of past not only CLM but others as well
- Support those who support us through mentoring, training and animating; explore more Columban Mission partnership
- A movement towards more Mission Units with possibility of Lay Leadership
- Mission Unit model of leadership; Coordinating committee composed of lay, ordained and co-worker
- Coordinators can be lay missionaries in Mission Unit leadership structure
- Partnership with other lay organizations, NGPs, local and national church (networking)
- Include lay partners in the leadership roles e.g., “the season of Creation” can become part of the Liturgical and Sacramental life of Diocese and we can design and facilitate this for parishes
- We can thrive in “coordination” (partnership with laity)

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations?

- We should let the candidate understand; clear understanding about Columban mission
- Invite partners to Columban Mission through “come and see”; enhance SIM (short invitation to mission-local); vocation to LM and Priesthood will continue to be facilitated
- That the Society continue to accept priestly vocations in accordance with our culture of lay/ordained partnerships; being careful in our selection processes for vocation candidates
- There is no guarantee for the future of our students but we believe that the Columban charism is a gift to the Church and for the life of the world. Thus, continue to accept

vocation with the initial year spent in their own culture before coming to Manila, this can be done through mentoring

- Promote vocation culture in parishes where we work and with Columban benefactors
- Formation with other Congregations or Dioceses. Include lay formators (Spiritual Directors, Personal Companions, etc.)
- Find ways to assign clerics/priests to Columban Eco-groups/communities which may have lay leadership roles.
- Approaches to vocations -> what worked? What did not work?

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

- Columban Mission Partners to support CLM
- Suspension of LM recruitment for 5 years is a decision to end it
- LMs might need to consider engaging in mission defined by the Society as priorities
- Inclusion of a lay missionary (LM) in the General Council (no more CLT); inclusion of LM in the Regional Council (no more LMLT); possible changes in the Society's Constitution and Directory to address above recommendations
- Priests may emerge from Eco groups/structures but primarily we do not need to recruit "priest candidates"

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

- No vocation, no future
- Strengthen Columban Mission Partners; Appreciation of "Eucharistic Communities"
- Keeping the charisms and values of the Society alive in a radically different way
- We can not sustain the Society without continuing to accept vocation
- Newly ordained members must be assigned to priority mission areas like Myanmar, Pakistan, etc.
- Is it possible to sustain the Society without vocations? In the short-term, collaboration with other groups – lay, NGOs, local church, co-workers, mission partners, other congregations
- Ask other groups who are facing similar transitions about their ideas
- Sustainability of the Society → building the kingdom of God is still possible

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

- We should let ourselves be available for the real sign of times rather than insisting on our own interest. The real demands of these times, like environment.

- Join and participate in Columban Mission Unit/communities; willingness to make personal sacrifices for the Society
- It is a leap of faith → that Columbans are willing to shift ministries to respond to these changes.
- A renewed commitment to Columban mission where we are needed and sent. We believe we still have a passion for Columban mission although we do not know what the future is.
- Personal ministries should be discouraged
- Self-transformation, openness and willingness to newness – assignments, ministries, RMUs, etc. Self-sacrifice – letting go of.....
- Form and continue to promote minimum waste and pollution in our communities and society
- Be more intentional in our missionary commitment

PMU Group Feedback on the Evans Report

In a PowerPoint presentation, Liam O'Callaghan highlighted the important points in the interim report of Dr. Carolyn Evans. This provided a reality check. 75% of members responded to the survey which is a high rate of response. Time is of the essence and it is time to make difficult but critical decisions. The Society is not sustainable in its present form, and how it carries out its mission. We need to cut our cloth according to measure. The key word in the review is reconfiguration. Should we concentrate in specific areas; areas of extreme poverty and where inter-faith dialogue is possible?

We discussed the questions posed in the interim report:

Q. 1 What is the new face of God for the Columbans in our times?

- *What was the old face of God for Columbans? Was there ever a uniform one? More likely many different faces and understandings of God.*
- *The new face of God for our times is stained by war, violence, ecological breakdown, forced migration, poverty.*
- *In light of the Columban reality today, the new face of God grimaces from the pain of ageing, vulnerability, struggle, dying, closure.*
- *It also encompasses the reality of our presence with people in their struggle, reflecting the presence of God within each one*

Q. 2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership?

- A basic starting point is, we cannot stay as we are. The reality of our present numbers and diminishment means that change is being forced on us; the question for us is how can we proactively shape that change to ensure the best possible outcome. What kind of RMU personnel configuration can be imagined?
- By narrowing down and streamlining leadership roles we can free up some personnel.
- Identifying regions (could be present RMUs or areas or ministries within existing RMUs) which are viable and that best respond and embody Columban priorities in order to concentrate personnel, appointments, resources etc. in these.
- In the context of a major reduction in priestly and lay missionaries' vocations, we should consider the possibility of amalgamating the Society to another like-minded society. Is this possible or viable?
- The suggestion to stop accepting vocations on moral and ethical concerns, a sort of "mind conditioning" betrays a very defeatist attitude.
- As time goes on, more and more work being done in RMUs will have to be done by lay workers?
- As said above, we cannot stay as we are. Restructuring RMUs is difficult but must be undertaken in order to ensure mission can continue, even in small numbers and in specific areas and preferably working on specific Columban priorities.
- What could this look like? Possibly setting up small mission units within existing RMUs for specific Columban ministry priorities e.g. JPIC, care for creation, IRD, migration. These mission units would be ring fenced in terms of priority in appointments, resources etc. Examples of such mission units would be: - Mexican border, focusing on migration; JPIC and IRD ministries in Britain; Pakistan focusing on tribal ministry, care for creation, IRD; Taiwan – migration and tribal ministry; Dublin - IRD and JPIC; Mindanao – IRD; Manila and/or Negros – care for creation.
- It is clear that more co-workers and lay people will be required to carry out more and more Columban work as numbers of ordained decline.

Q. 3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

- We can exhaust everything we can within the limits of the Society's Constitution and Canon Law in order to ensure greater participation in the Society's mission.
- We have a natural resistance to change; we need to engage in inner work. The Holy Spirit will lead us.
- We tend to stay with the status quo. We have to let go. We cannot do everything.

- A more conscious and proactive approach to connecting with and cooperating with like-minded NGOs, civil secular groups who are working on the priority issues we share e.g. migration, environmental crisis, JPIC, etc. By inculcating and sharing our values and priority concerns with these groups, we can possibly influence them in this work and help ensure it may continue in the future, even when we are not around.

Q. 4. *Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept vocations?*

- To concentrate in strategic places for vocation promotion and recruitment - Myanmar, Fiji, Korea and the Philippines.
- To train young ordained formators for the future.
- There is no assurance that vocation numbers will increase.
- There is a question re the standards of applicants, as there is a difference in standards in each RMU, for example education standards, proficiency in English etc.
- There was no overall consensus on this question; some questioned the sustainability of formation and see it as not ethical to invite young men to join when we know we will not be able to support them into the future. Others felt the idea of stopping recruitment is against the whole purpose of the Society from the beginning and are unhappy with it.
- There was no real addition to this point. There is still a strong opinion among the younger ordained that any talk of ceasing formation is equivalent to close down/dying and something they do not want to contemplate. This position has even hardened since the convention.

Q. 5 *Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society manage that nexus?*

- Support from the sending RMU is vital, in terms of recruitment, formation, funding and on-going support. Priority will have to be given to it if CLM is to survive. Is the same process sustainable in each RMU?
- We need to continue the formation of LMs.
- The question of standards also applies to LM vocations. This issue needs to be looked at.
- The big change since the PMU convention has been the decision taken at the CLM meeting in Manila to cease recruitment for five years. This will have major ramifications for CLM and the Society as well. It is a contentious decision and only time will tell how wise it is. The proposal to focus on two priority areas has merit and has the potential to improve focus and create a clear identity for CLM and so potentially have the possibility of attracting new members. However, there is also the possibility of disturbance, having to leave behind good ministries, encounter language difficulties if moving to new areas etc. There needs to be a big 'buy in' to this new reality by LMs and the Society at large in order for it to work

Q. 6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilise or grow the ordained leadership?

- GA2024 is crucial to making a decision one way or the other. What is our position?
- This is a big question for the SSC. It divides opinion.
- 15-20 ordinations a year would be necessary to sustain the Society at its present level. But the spirit does not seem to be moving in that direction. There are some vocations, but they tend to be more traditional and conservative.
- Why are we not attracting vocations? We have formators but no vocations. We need to look at the model of our vocation structure and the effectiveness of our vocation's recruitment teams.
- Some members are not in favour of the idea of not accepting vocations in the future. The young ordained should be heard. Closing should be a last resort.
- Columban vocation recruitment are looking for angels. Vocations are going to other societies and congregations. There is an example of five people in one RMU rejected by Columbans but who are now ordained for the diocese and other congregations.
- Concentrate on continual improvement in the International formation programme; Manila is doing very well with a good system in place.
- Students in the International formation programme are not dropping out over recent years, which is unusual, which leaves a question mark.
- Some members feel there should be a plan for phasing down formation and this should happen at GA2024. The reasons given – very small numbers joining, little or no candidates in the pipeline, ineffective vocation recruitment programmes, difficult to find a RMU to host an FMA programme, young members being called back to their home regions. This position is a minority position in the group.
- The Paris Foreign Society stopped formation and made an agreement with a French diocese to form their students, could we consider something like this?
- Most of the younger ordained members are of the opinion that vocations should be a priority in this GA, trying to do what we can to continue formation/vocation programmes. The voices of the young need to be heard.

Q. 7 What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

- There was a sense that here in the PMU we are trying to be faithful to the priorities the Society has set and in that sense are living it out.
- The reality is that members of the PMU will be needed in their home Regions or other RMUs to ensure these structural changes actually happen. We will have to be open to let people go, even if that will have negative effects on ministries here, maybe possibly even having to close some.

TMU Feedback on GAPC's External Report Questions

The TMU met together to discuss the following questions posed by the GAPC.

2. What can be done by reconfiguring organizational arrangements of the Society to reduce the demands on clerical leadership? e.g. dispense with Regions in favour of Mission Units? If so, how many places of Mission (single country) can be sustained?

The TMU agrees that the move from Regions to MUs is necessary, not only to reduce structural burdens, but also to allow for structures that enhance partnership and inclusivity through shared leadership, shared decision making and shared responsibility.

Most TMU members feel that there must be a big reduction in the number of MUs, but there was no consensus on exactly how many MUs are sustainable long term. Most members felt that that the number of MUs should be reduced to 3-5 as soon as feasible.

However, one member suggests that attempting to reduce the number of MUs will cause resistance. What will happen if people refuse to follow decisions of the GA and the incoming GC? It would be better to assign new members to only a few selected MUs and let the other MUs die off gradually. Another member wonders what it means to be sustainable? Some missionary groups are smaller than the SSC but they keep running. How many personnel are necessary to carry out mission in an MU?

For the most part, TMU members agree that there is a need for a radical consolidation of the Society's personnel and resources into a few MUs. This will enable the Society to concentrate its missionary "footprint" and maximize its practice of partnership.

The first thing the Society must do is to honestly address a core question: Is the Society's real priority vocations and fundraising (survival of the Society) or is it mission? The Principal External Report has little to say about fundraising, but some TMU members wonder how important a consideration fundraising is.

Depending on whether the Society's priority is vocations/fundraising or mission, criteria for selecting which (R)MUs will remain open can be determined. The TMU believes the priority should be mission, and suggests the following criteria:

1. Partnership – Structures of support for LMs, but also structures of equality, shared leadership and shared decision making. Partnership is the most distinguishing characteristic of the SSC.
2. Mission – Select MUs where we can best engage in the Society's priority ministries. (What then where, rather than where then what.)
3. Vocations – At a minimum this would mean continuing to have (R)MUs in Fiji, Korea and the Philippines.
4. Fundraising – The more financially self-sufficient the MU, the better. Is there a need for (R)MUs whose primary task is raising money?

3. What can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for mission that widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?

What is meant by “engage with?” The TMU chose to understand this as meaning creating inclusive structures that allow full and equal participation of LMs. This raises the issue of membership. Given the strictures of Canon Law, it is likely that a new entity needs to be established in which LMs and the ordained are members with the same rights, including voting privileges and the right to take on leadership roles.

The TMU has opened leadership roles to LMs, and we have experienced opposition to this in many quarters of the SSC. We therefore wonder how open the Society is to full partnership with LMs.

Co-workers are a separate matter. There needs to be a clear definition of co-worker. Co-workers have contracts and salaries, and they are free to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. They are hired to perform specific tasks for the Society. In addition to fulfilling these tasks, co-workers should act in the capacity of consultants. Because of their expertise, it is important to include their voices in discussions and planning. But decisions are made by the Society’s leadership and members.

4. Is there any approach to vocations that appears canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept priestly vocations? If yes, what are they?

For some TMU members the mention of “ethical” is problematic, giving them the feeling that the continuation of vocations is being discouraged. If the Society is completely transparent about the circumstances of the SSC, would it be unethical to accept vocations from those who choose to join the Society despite our uncertain future? Some TMU members feel that it is valid to ask this kind of question.

Our approach to vocations certainly must continue to be canonically sound, secularly legal, and ethical.

The real question is the practicality. Are there ways to improve our approach to vocations? Vocation promotion work is under-developed in many RMUs. Do we have the necessary personnel for vocation work, formation and mentoring? Could we revisit the possibility of accepting vocations from countries where the Columbans are not present (for example, Vietnam)? How about pooling formation resources with other congregations or the diocese? Exploring all avenues with a positive and hopeful attitude is important.

5. Since vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, how might the Society similarly manage that?

The group was not able to understand this question. We requested clarification from the GAPC. We were informed that the point is that in the past many LMs came to the Society through a priest missionary and engaged in ministries facilitated by priests.

This has long since not been the case. The key point is that a missionary presence is important for attracting vocations, lay and ordained.

This emphasizes the need for the Society to consolidate personnel in a very few MUs in which there are structures for full partnership with LMs. The mission presence of teams of LMs and priests provides the best environment for combined effort in taking an active approach to both lay and priest vocation promotion.

This is all moot if the GA accepts the CLMIM's recommendation to suspend seeking LM vocations for five years.

6. What can be done to sustain the Society without vocations sufficient to stabilize or grow the ordained membership?

This sounds like the same refusal to face reality that has characterized the Society for the last 30+ years. If we accept what the Principle External Report says, we must have an increase in ordinations or the Society cannot be sustained much beyond ten years. The Report does not question whether we need more ordinations to sustain the Society. What the Report questions is whether the Society, as things now stand, even has the capacity to accomplish what needs to be done. That is what is not clear.

The hopeful approach, then, is to make the radical changes, as outlined above, that prioritize mission and maximize partnership, creating a visible presence that gives us the best chance to attract both lay and ordained vocations. The rest is up to God.

7. What change might we Columbans each make in our lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to bring new life to the Society?

This depends on what these "institutional changes" are. The changes must inspire the under-65 LMs and priests to want to join in. "Bring new life to mission" would be more inspiring than "bring new life to the Society." One TMU member said he would not mind changing his ministry to help in vocations. There must be a balance between being engaged in mission work and taking on leadership roles. Leadership roles cannot be full time. Teamwork and equality are indispensable.

Minor matters should not have to go to a central leadership team for decision. Small missionary teams must be able to decide most matters for themselves.

Response of the St. Columban's Residence (Bristol) community to the Evans Report (Principal Report for General Assembly 2024):

After several meetings, held in response to the GAPC's request for further input from the Regions and Mission Units to the Evans Report, we have decided to respond with this collective statement:

We support synodal "Walking together" methodology in our General Assembly process. Synodal methods of listening attentively to one another, sharing what we really feel, and growing in understanding one another are positive path for addressing

our current situation. As Frank Hoare wrote in his article, we all need to respond to the present crisis by “opening the floor” and putting forward our own ideas.

The General Assembly should begin with a retreat, with in-depth prayer and listening to talks, as well as talking with one another, like the Synod process. This would be a good way to let loose enthusiasm for a new beginning, and inculcate a shared attitude of responsibility for the outcome.

The process at all levels presently includes ongoing viewing and discussion of materials, videos, speakers (including theologians from Catholic universities), in preparation for the General Assembly, and if we organize ourselves to take advantage of these steps, could give us some optimism for how we are moving into the future. We recognize that “Dialogue circles” can still be formed among us, and we notice that small groups seem to be helpful elsewhere in the Society.

Vocations. Some of us are open to planned closure, understood as the completion of our mission, and the ending of vocations recruitment for both the Lay Mission program and missionary priesthood. We want to avoid raising false expectations of large numbers of young men and women drawn to our missioned life. However, F. Hoare’s point about younger members’ writing as a way to vocationally draw in younger people represents a realistic way of thinking, for those of us who do not want to shut the door on vocations. The point was also made in our discussion that openness to admitting married men to the priesthood (which surfaced in the Amazon Synod) could also draw in more vocations. In the final analysis, it is likely that younger members would be more real about deciding to accept more vocations, or not, and their input on this matter needs special attention. Older members might overwhelm the younger about such Society and General Assembly decisions.

Younger and Older Members: Those “under 65” are the ones who will make or break our projects for continuation, and seem to promote the vision on mission to other countries. We want to listen to them and learn from what they have to say.

We must all be prepared to move. John Marley’s move from Bristol to Dalgan at 97 years of age is an example for us, showing his personal willingness to grow and to do what is necessary.

We appreciate the hard work of our younger members and LMs right now, this energizes us to see that. However, we also need to balance this work of the younger members with the value of the experience and wisdom of the older members.

A New Mission Enterprise and Focus: Perhaps we can strive to spin off our younger members into a new mission enterprise, and provide a ‘remnant’ to support them. But there is still a need for a ‘founder’ kind of person, or even two or three. We cannot go back to the old days, but we can change to survive.

The new focus can include new “faces of God” for people of our times, such as the Good Shepherd, a friendlier God, less stern, with Jesus considered as our brother, the Father as the Creator of our natural home, ...broader concepts of God, who is with us and wants us to do things now, promoting friendly chats, listening, honesty. Also, we need to recognize the face of God in the displaced, the rootless, the poor and migrants.

Society Structures: We have an opportunity to start something really new—more inclusive, less clerical, with greater collaboration and equality. The General Assembly 2024 should look at the possibilities—an association, a reform of the Society—and then it can be evaluated after five years. An association could more easily welcome those who want to collaborate with us in a diversity of ways. Happily, in our own Residential community, we already have an advisory group formed and working, which is a more collaborative model of leadership.

Local Parish and Church: Frank Hoare’s mention of the element of “working from some parish bases” is supported, because the People of God in the dioceses where we work can help and teach us a great deal, grounding our conversations and planning. Otherwise, we risk “floating in the air” and becoming unrealistic in our plans and goals.

4 April 2024

(Note from the Director, Chris Saenz - The Bristol Community accounts for nearly half of the Regional Membership)