



Sometimes we know
what we have to do, but
we lack the courage to
do it. Let us learn from
Mary how to make
decisions, trusting in the
Lord. - Pope Francis

Companion Guide

To the Principal Report for
General Assembly 2024

Prepared by CA
1 February 2024

Companion Guide to the Principal Report

INTRODUCTION

The General Council and CLT recognize the full Principal Report is comprehensive, dense, and maybe even emotional reading. This document is meant to be a companion to the Principal Report (PR) provided by Caroline Evans and an aid for reflection on key questions raised in the report.

Most of the text is taken directly from the report. The sections below follow the sections of the report. Also included are reflection questions suggested by Ted Dunn's (TD) *Inner Work* in the book that has been a reference point for reflection since the IRMU. We suggest that this guide can be used for both personal reflection as well as in pairs or groups such as the Dialogue Circles.

OVERVIEW: PR # 120-123

Implications of a smaller and older Society need not be accepted as inevitably leading to closure, but should be considered proactively, and by approaching internal factors quite differently to external factors.

- If the Region model is no longer a sustainable structure, is the Mission Unit structure one that will benefit the purpose of the society? How many places of mission (single country?) can be sustained? (PR #109-110)
- What internal factors are members prepared to openly acknowledge and discuss as limitations on the potential footprint of the Society?
- What formal change to internal factors are members prepared to embrace to prolong the life of the Society and foster its missionary purpose?
- What change could members, especially those under 65, make towards being co-responsible for their place of mission in refreshed institutional arrangements?
- What action could the Society take, short of canonical change, to create a visibly more encompassing and welcoming missionary footprint?
- What changes could members, especially those under 65, make in what they do day to day as evidence the Society is evolving a more encompassing footprint that will also be more sustainable over the course of their lifetimes?
- What contribution might each person make towards refreshing the Columban footprint, especially those under 65 years as the principal group on which the Society will rely in the future - including so that those in the general community might readily encounter a missionary to learn about the missionary purpose?



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MISSION PRIORITIES: PR #161 - 162

What are your deepest longings and greatest aspirations for yourself and for the Society? What will help stretch your/the Society's soul to become new again? (TD)

In a fresh expression of mission, the number of places in which Columbans will be active is key to the future sustainability of the Society: in particular, if they are too many then the Columbans will continue to be spread too thinly to have a suitably visible footprint and will limit those in the general community to (knowingly) encounter a missionary.



- How well might the will and purpose of the Society transform into activities that create an inspiring Columban “footprint” of some kind? (PR #139)
- What reduction in places of mission are members prepared to embrace in order to prolong the life of the Society and better foster its missionary purpose?
- Within a fresh expression of mission, distinctively Columban ministries set it apart from, for example, the broader run of non-government organizations (NGOs) that are at work in many of the same places as missionary societies.
- What new or different ministries would be enlivening for Columbans and assist in making the Society and its missionary purpose distinctive?

VOCATIONS: PR 219-221

Describe what might be the deeper invitation for you/ the Society at this time. What might you/the Society need to let go or let die to respond to this deeper invitation. How might you/ the Society nourish this deeper invitation. (TD)

Those responding to the consultation survey were, on the whole, reluctant to be charged with fostering vocations to Columban priesthood or lay missionary service, despite being in no doubt about the importance of this for the future of the Society and its mission.

The overarching implication is that, without a dramatic change of direction, it is arguable that the Columbans should seriously consider immediately ceasing to accept vocations for new lay missionaries, and quite possibly for ordained missionaries as well - placing the focus squarely on what positive action Columbans are individually and collectively prepared to take to prolong the life of the Society. (PR # 209).

- How can time and effort be afforded to vocations outreach in hope of a more stable and sustainable membership? (PR # 157).
- If not prepared to take formal responsibility for fostering vocations, Columbans still need to contribute to this effort - so what will each undertake to do towards this essential element of a thriving Society?
- Without taking formal responsibility for fostering vocations, Columbans could

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relocate to help create more sustainable teams for mission, which would be more visible and potentially more inviting for vocations - so who is prepared to volunteer to do this?

- As a further expression of their missionary purpose, what fresh commitment might Columbans make towards recognizing that “we are they” and that every member might contribute to co-responsibility for a reconfigured Society.

OPENINGS: PR #251-257

What are you / the Society desiring to become? (TD)

There is particular challenge for those deliberating at GA 2024: they will need to work hard to avoid the temptation to make a bit of change in the hope that it goes well enough to make a bit more. That sort of incremental approach is, in effect, the path followed by successive General Assemblies at least since 1994. This sums to a powerful need for taking a bigger and bolder step at GA 2024 (...) If the project team were to venture an opinion here, it would be that the necessary step would be to devise a fresh organizational model that speaks more directly to the needs of the future (...) (PR #240-242).

- Do members support formal change to (externally-determined) institutional arrangements so as to prolong the life of the Society and continue to foster its missionary purpose?
- Do members wish to see further exploration of canonical change at this time?



Reconfiguring

Reconfiguring the institutional arrangements around fewer leadership roles in order to focus, reinforce, and expand capacity for animating mission, ministry, and vocations “outreach” - but this unavoidably involves change to the present RMUs, where more change would likely do more good (PR # 232.i)

- After due reflection on the way to GA 2024, to prolong the life of the Society what generative change can be made to internal arrangements, via institutional reconfiguring, rescoping activities and the places in which they are present, and recasting the net on leadership to widen possibilities for filling each role?
- After due reflection on the way to GA 2024, what change might Columbans each make in their lives and ministries to support these institutional changes to revivify the Society?
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Rescoping

Rescoping activities on a wider scale, in light of internal and external points of focus so as to best support visibility of mission priorities that resonate with the wider community, further enabling vocations “outreach” - but this calls for having fewer clerics who exercise canonical authority, plus withdrawing from some places and seeking more congregational and diocesan cooperation (PR 232.ii)

- Do members support first dispensing with Regions in favor of Mission Units as the basic way of organizing the Society’s people and works? If so, how many MUs can be sustained fruitfully?
- Would a "single country" MU model help to make MUs more sustainable?
- Does the present MU Coordinator role sufficiently express the leadership needed for a single country MU (when supported by a coordinating committee to suit local circumstances)?
- Assuming MU Coordinators would link directly to the Superior General for canonical purposes, what different or additional arrangements would assist on that, and/or support MUs cohering together strongly as the Society?

Recasting

Recasting the net on leadership to widen possibilities for filling each role to best effect, and thus overcoming some of the constraints that are the natural consequence of a smaller and older (clerical) Society - but that will involve accepting direction from more lay leaders (though without needing to amend canonical arrangements) and realizing progress on genuine accountability in light of clericalism (in keeping with the IRMU recommendation) (PR # 232.iii).

- How might the present expression of the MU Coordinator role be refreshed to further develop the effective involvement of laity in leadership of the Society?
- What else can be done in reconfiguring Society arrangements for mission that would widen the openings in which to engage with lay leadership?
- What might be evidenced in a refreshed approach to day-to-day practice by all Columbans that would demonstrate authentic embrace of lay leadership?
- What approach to fostering priestly vocations is canonically sound, secularly legal, ethical, and practical, or should the Society cease to accept new vocations?
- Vocations for lay missionaries also rely fundamentally on leadership afforded by clergy, so how might the Society similarly manage that nexus?
- What else, if anything, might be done to sustain the Society if vocations are not likely to be sufficient to stabilize ordained membership?