

Myanmar Mission Unit Pre-Assembly Meeting Report

MMU Pre-Assembly meeting was held in the Central House of Myitkyina, Myanmar, from the 27th of November to the 28th of November in 2023. It was the first time that all MMU members gathered together face to face for the meeting in Myanmar.

The meeting demonstrated a commitment to addressing IRMU 2023 recommendations, fostering accountability, and strategic planning within the MMU. All members engaged in thoughtful and hopeful discussions, laying the groundwork for future actions and decisions.

<Session 1>

Date:	November 27 th , 2023, Morning Session: 9am to 12noon
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Attendees:	Catharina Seonyoung Son
	Eamon Sheridan
	Francis Xavier Nawi La Aung
	Jehoon Augustine Lee
	Kurt Zion Pala
	Michael Javier
	Rafael Ramirez Salazar
	Alvaro Martinez (GC observer from Hong Kong)
	Vida Hequilan (LMCLT observer from Hong Kong)

Meeting Highlights:

➤ Opening Prayer: Catharina Son initiated the meeting with a prayer, setting a reflective and open atmosphere for the discussions that followed.
➤ Observer Welcome: Alvaro Martinez and Vida Hequilan were welcomed as observers by Eamon Sheridan, acknowledging their presence from the LMCLT and the GC in Hong Kong.
➤ Leadership Designation: Jehoon Lee, designated as the meeting president and MMU delegate to GA 2024, will make a comprehensive report on the meeting discussions.

- Meeting Process: Number off to 2 small groups discussion, emphasizing the importance of addressing recommendations from IRMU 2023.
Discussion small groups for the morning session.
 - Group 1: Catharina, Eamon, Jehoon, La Awng, and Alvaro
 - Group 2: Kurt, Michael, Rafael, and Vida
- There was a plenary session sharing after small groups discussion.

Discussion Points:

Recommendation 1: Create a Culture of Accountability

How do you give expression to a culture of accountability in the MMU?/Why challenges and obstacles to accountability to we perceive?

Action Plan:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants stressed the need for comprehensive action plan, including both group and individual accountability. We discussed the importance of clarity regarding the identity of Columbians in Myanmar and the necessity for a clear vision and mission.
Challenges and Obstacles:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identified individualism and a reluctance to challenge others as obstacles to implementing accountability. ➤ Highlighted a lack of knowledge about local culture among MMU members. ➤ Discussed the need to review and revise the 2016 MMU policy, including a policy and plan for vocations and vacation time. ➤ Raised the question of whether the Society Manual of Policy and Procedures could be simplified for practical implementation.

Recommendation 2: Conduct a Strategic Independent Review

What is our vision for the future structure of a much smaller SSC? /Where does the MMU fit into this vision?

Vision for the Future:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explored ideas for a smaller, more focused SSC
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	<p>with Synodality, simpler structures, and more significant local involvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participants emphasized the importance of letting go of certain RMUs and ministries for sustainability.
Society Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussed the flexibility of JPIC/IRD priorities in MMU, focusing on making connections with local communities and sustainable practices. ➤ Highlighted the challenge and necessity of involving local people in missions and co-workers. ➤ Emphasized the potential for animating the Laudato Si movement and IRD.

The MMU Pre-assembly meeting commenced on November 27th, 2023, and was filled with insightful discussions. The meeting included Kurt, acting as the Chairperson, Eamon taking minutes, and participants Rafael, Jehoon, Michael, La Aung, and Catharina. Vida and Alvaro attended as observers from the LMCLT and the GC in Hong Kong.

The meeting opened with a meaningful prayer led by Catharina, setting a contemplative tone for the life-sharing that followed. Alvaro Martinez and Vida Hequilan, GC and LMCLT observers from Hong Kong, were welcomed to the proceedings by Eamon Sheridan, MMU coordinator.

Jehoon Lee, acknowledged as the president of the meeting and the designated delegate to GA 2024, added a significant note of responsibility to the discussions. Kurt Pala, in his role, explained the procedural aspects of the meeting, getting things ready for a productive session.

The participants were divided into two groups to address four key questions, which were prepared by the preparatory committee comprising Catharina Son, Eamon Sheridan, and Michael Javier. These questions were strategically designed to delve into the recommendations put forth by IRMU 2023, fostering in-depth discussions before GA 2024.

Recommendation 1 from IRMU 2023 urged the creation of a culture of accountability supported by rigorous policy procedures and ongoing monitoring. In response, both groups agreed on the necessity of an action plan, emphasizing group and individual accountability. They stressed the importance of clarity regarding the identity of Columbans in Myanmar and the need for collaboration between lay missionaries and ordained members. Discussions also touched on leadership roles, mutual care for life, health, spirituality, and the challenges of individualism.

Obstacles were honestly acknowledged, including individualism and a reluctance to challenge others, a lack of knowledge about local culture, and the necessity to review and revise the existing MMU policy. The Society Manual of Policy and Procedures was considered lengthy, prompting a suggestion for simplification and reflection on its implementation in personal lives and ministries.

Recommendation 2 from IRMU 2023 focused on conducting a strategic independent review of the Columban Society, contemplating a future configuration of a smaller SSC. The vision for this future structure involved mission units practicing Synodality, simpler structures, and a necessary but giving up certain RMUs and ministries. The emphasis was on becoming more focused as the MMU and the Society, with a special focus on Asia. The priority of flexibility in implementing JPIC/IRD in the MMU was acknowledged, with a call to foster friendships, show compassion, and animate the Laudato Si movement. Involving local people in mission activities and co-working was emphasized, recognizing the challenges and necessities associated with letting go of certain components for a sustainable future.

As the conversations progressed, it became clear that, even though the MMU is a small Mission Unit, it is committed to an ongoing and enduring mission.

The meeting concluded with a profound acknowledgment of the ongoing mission, underlining the importance of adapting to change, focusing on the smaller, concrete actions, and finding sustainable ways forward. The deliberations set a solid foundation for the MMU's role and vision in the dynamic landscape of the Columban Society.

<Session 2>

Date:	November 27 th , 2023, Afternoon Session: 2pm to 4:30pm
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Discussion Points:

<p>Recommendation 3: Evaluation of Vocation Programs</p> <p>Discuss the response to the proposal for a 5-year suspension of vocation/orientation programs. What is our response to this? What are our hopes and plans for our vocation/formation program in the MMU.</p>	
Response to Suspension Proposal:	Disagreed with the suspension, citing ongoing vocations in Myanmar.
Hopes and Plans for Vocation/Formation Program:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Design and implement an FMA program, requesting FMA students. ➤ Explore the possibility of establishing an Education Center for students. ➤ Establish a Columban Mission Office for vocation, mission, and JPIC/IRD promotion. ➤ Review requirements for candidates, consider university completion, and explore philosophy program options in Myanmar. ➤ Emphasized the need for commitment to building the mission in Myanmar with local involvement.
Insights:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognized the presence of many prospective students in Myanmar. ➤ Acknowledged the limited options beyond a university degree. ➤ Explored the role of the CLM (Columban Lay Missionaries) in recruitment. ➤ Discussed the possibility of an education center and local animators for vocation

	programs.
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Recommendation 6 : Define a New Expression of Columban Missionaries

Discuss how to convey the passion for cross-cultural mission in a way that resonates with people's everyday lives.

Proposed Actions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Actively promote Columban identity. ➤ Establish a Columban Mission Office to encourage locals as mission partners. ➤ Utilize central houses for workshops and seminars. ➤ Use materials like T-shirts, remembrance, or medallions for promotion. ➤ Celebrate Columban's Day as an opportunity to showcase identity.
Insights:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identified a lack of defined words for LM's identity. ➤ Emphasized the need to clarify Columban identity. ➤ Advocated for the development of new expressions for identity and faith.

Vision for the MMU Over the Next 5 Years:

Insights:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Grounded mission plan needed, balancing spirituality and social work. ➤ Fresh energy and passion expected with new local Columban members.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emphasis on bringing hope in uncertain times, focusing on small, concrete actions. ➤ Involvement of locals as co-workers in sharing the mission.
Proposed Action Items:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement Mission Office and Education Center. ➤ Ordain four local (Myanmar) students. ➤ Increase seminarian vocations, potentially opening an LM vocation in Myanmar. ➤ Implement FMA program, mission office, vocation promotion, and partnership. ➤ Engage LM in youth programs and leadership roles. ➤ Hire local workers for vocation promotion.

In the afternoon session of the MMU Pre-Assembly meeting on the 27th of November, La Aung acted the role of the chairperson, guiding the discussions alongside Michael, who took minutes. The small discussion groups shifted, with Eamon, Kurt, Michael, and Vida forming one group while Catharina, Jehoon, La Aung, Rafael, and Alvaro composed the other.

The agenda led the participants to talk about Recommendation 3 from IRMU 2023. The proposal suggested an independent review of vocation programs, contemplating a 5-year suspension. After each group discussed, plenary session sharing was followed. All members opposed the suspension, citing the ongoing presence of vocations in Myanmar. Their vision for the vocation/formation program included designing an FMA program, exploring an Education Center, and establishing a Columban Mission Office for comprehensive promotion. They

stressed the importance of individual commitment to building the mission within Myanmar.

Participants highlighted the abundance of prospective students in Myanmar and the limited options beyond a university degree. Moreover, they considered the CLM's role in recruitment, discussed the potential of an education center, and emphasized the need for local animators in vocation programs.

Moving to Recommendation 6 from IRMU 2023, which suggested exploring a new expression of Columban missionaries, participants proposed actively promoting Columban identity. They envisioned a Columban Mission Office to encourage local participation and suggested practical strategies like workshops, making remembrances, and celebrations on Columban's Day.

Participants delved into the complex of identity, emphasizing the lack of defined terms, especially for LM's identity, and advocating for clarity in expressing Columban identity and faith.

As the meeting progressed, the participants contemplated the vision for the MMU over the next 5 years. Members emphasized the need for a grounded mission plan, balancing spirituality and social work. They anticipated a surge of energy with new local Columban members, aiming to bring hope in uncertain times through small, concrete actions and involving locals as co-workers.

MMU members outlined a detailed action plan. Their vision included implementing the proposed Mission Office and Education Center, ordaining four Columban Myanmar students, increasing seminarian vocations, and actively engaging local workers in vocation promotion, as well as the JPIC/IRD ministry.

The session concluded with a short prayer, underscoring the collective commitment to the envisioned mission and the actions outlined during the session. The productive discussions and proposed strategies set the stage for a dynamic and hopeful future for the MMU.

<Session 3>

Date:	November 28 th , 2023, Morning Session: 9am to 10:15am
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Proposed changes to the Constitutions and Directory	
C.311.2	Approved 6 Disapproved 0 Abstention 1
C.311.3	Approved 6 Disapproved 0 Abstention 1
C.330	Approved 7 Disapproved 0 Abstention 0
PMU (Membership of the Society)	Approved 0 Disapproved 7 Abstention 0
C.313.3	Approved 0 Disapproved 7 Abstention 0

Update on the Guidance and Policy regarding the Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults by Alvaro Martinez from GC.
➤ Policy and Guidelines Update
➤ Emphasis on Accountability and Auditing
➤ Serious Handling of Accusations
➤ Regular Communication/Documentation

Conclusion of the MMU Pre-Assembly

In the morning session of the MMU Pre-assembly meeting on November 28, 2023, Catharina was the chairperson, guiding the discussions for proposed changes to the Society's Constitutions and Directory. And Rafael took minutes.

Before the meeting began, all members were asked to look through the documentation of proposed changes to the Constitutions and agreed to bring up what was significant to themselves and MMU instead of dealing with all proposed changes. Unified in their commitment to adapt to evolving needs, MMU members engaged in a thoughtful discourse about the proposed modifications.

The first set of proposed changes, C.311.2 and C.311.3, got significant attention. C.311.2 suggested making all permanent members of the Society and long-term Columban Lay Missionaries eligible for election to the General Assembly, excluding only "ex officio"

members, diocesan bishops, and their legal equivalents. The simultaneous proposal, C.311.3, aimed to extend voting rights to Columban Lay Missionaries and both permanent and temporary Society members for delegates to the General Assembly, with similar exclusions as in C.311.2. After a thorough discussion, both changes received unanimous support from six votes, with one member choosing to abstain.

Another proposed change, C.330, addressing the General Council's residence decisions based on the exigencies of the Society's governance and mission, received unanimous backing from all present members.

Following these constitution-related discussions, Alvaro Martinez, providing a significant update, shifted the focus to the crucial topic of preventing the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. His recommendations included updating the existing Policy and Guidelines and emphasizing the need for a strong commitment to accountability and auditing. Alvaro stressed the importance of treating any accusations seriously, maintaining regular communication with everyone involved, and documenting each step of the process. Alvaro's update highlighted the commitment to safeguarding vulnerable individuals within the Society, encouraging a proactive approach and a culture of responsibility.

This last session ended at 10:15 am; the MMU members left with a renewed sense of purpose and hope. The discussions reflected their dedication to decision-making within the Society and demonstrated a collective commitment to the well-being and protection of its members, particularly the vulnerable. The session set the groundwork for continued collaboration and a strengthened governance framework in the MMU.

Submitted by Jehoon Augustine Lee