

PMU Convention Report – Nov. 16-17, 2023

Introduction; Proposed Journey to GA2024.

Liam opened the meeting by welcoming all, especially Brian Vale and John Boles. He then made a power-point presentation outlining the process of preparation for GA2024. The preparation includes five guest speaker inputs which commenced in September, and continued in October and November. The next two will be in December and February.

- **Guest Speaker One:** Ted Dunne; Vulnerability and Transformation.
- **Guest Speaker Two:** John Feehan; Faith and Ecological God.
- **Guest Speaker Three:** Abbot Brendan Coffey; Personal Transformation.
- **Guest Speaker Four:** Two ordained, two PMs, and two Co-workers; Signs of Hope.
- **Guest Speaker Five:** Br. Philip Pinto.

It is also suggested by GA2024 Preparatory Committee that each RMU follow up and reflect on these input sessions in dialogue groups. So far this has not happened at PMU level.

Liam also gave feedback from the IRMU Meeting in Korea in March 2023 which gives context to the GA preparation process. There were six recommendations, two of which (recommendations two and three) were given for an external review. The other four were discussed in two groups, with each group taking two each.

Recommendations One: To create a culture of accountability supported by rigorous policy and procedures and ongoing monitoring.

- We are well advanced and exceptionally good at having policies and protocols in place, but the question is, 'how effectively are they implemented at RMU level?' In many cases, not so good. Internal accountability should improve in terms of making sure that policies concerning the life and norms of the Society are implemented and followed.
- We need to be accountable and transparent in our reporting to our benefactors. In accessing Columban funds e.g. projects and funding from GC in the annual budget and other Columban donations the demands of reporting and accountability are significantly less than many international funding agencies. This can sometimes lead to a more casual and less than thorough approach to funds received and their reporting, which could mean a less that efficient use of funds or even misuse in extreme cases.
- General Council should be informed of serious events and happenings in RMUs, especially when they affect our policies, and the well-being of members. They should not just be kept withing the respective RMU.
- Are the statistics presented really accurate? They are stark, but yet do not reveal the full picture. They do not include Columbans who are doing their own thing, and therefore unavailable for Columban mission. They are not engaged with the mission priorities of the Society. They should

be held accountable. They should be regulated. When we take out members who are doing their own thing, and those who are not functioning well, it makes the statistics even starker.

- Is clericalism underneath some of the lack of accountability of ordained Columbans? We need not think that the Society is free of clericalism.

External Reviews Mandated by Recommendations 2 & 3

Recommendation Two: To conduct a strategic, independent review of the Columban Society in the light of mission priorities (JPIC/IRD, etc.) and to create a strategic plan of action based on that review.

Recommendation Three: To facilitate an independent review and assessment of the vocation programs on internal and external data, trends, and other congregational plans with a view to creating a strategic plan based on outcomes.

In a PowerPoint presentation, Liam highlighted the important points in the interim report of Dr. Carolyn Evans who was contracted to carry out the external reviews as recommended by IRMU Meeting in Seoul earlier this year.

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 five questions posed in the interim report: -

Q. 1. 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?

Q. 2. 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.

Q. 3. 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.

Q. 4. 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.

Q. 5. 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?

Recommendation Four: To grow our partnerships with Columban Lay Missionaries and co-workers as an integral part of the Columban mission and Gospel witness to the universal Church.

- Partnership between LMs and ordained is an important and stated preferred way of being on mission in the Society, and in the PMU this has been the way since 1990, we have received nine? LM programmes since then. Collaboration in mission and opportunities to grow together need to be strengthened e.g. ordained and LM's working together on vocation promotion and mission promotion.

- Co-workers' are an important part of the Society, and will become more so in the coming years. In many cases, they bring skills and professionalism not available in the Society and are filling specific and important roles across the Society. E.g. The Bursar General and her office are doing the majority of the financial accounting work for a number of smaller RMUs, which is particularly helpful.
- It would be helpful in RMUs if co-workers are invited more to share their experiences in meetings and other gatherings. We are striving for a greater collaboration and partnership than that associated with 'a paid worker'.
- LMs should be open to going back to their home region when needed.
- Try to assess the viability of work in certain RMUs. For example, does the vocation director need to be a priest? Or can the responsibility be given to lay co-workers?
- Focus on our mission priorities, and implement them so that we could narrow down our structures and personnel.
- We could also use the history of Columbans in Brazil as we let go of other RMUs.
- What RMUs could be possibly closed, that would free personnel for mission priorities.
- Is it possible for the Society leadership team to be located in different locations? A Society Leader will live in the headquarters while the councillors live in their different mission areas to maximize manpower.

Recommendation Five: To create a culture of mentoring and support for leadership that is shared and sustainable and includes co-workers.

- Perhaps to look at a new type of leadership, a shared collaborative leadership. There is a different culture of leadership in Mission Units when compared to Regions.
- Identify leaders early on and foster them to be future leaders of the society, encouraging younger members to take minor leadership roles early on and gain experience is essential in helping prepare them for larger roles later on.
- Support structures are important to have in place at all levels of leadership. Zoom calls of RMU leaders which began during the pandemic have proved helpful in terms of support and could be continued.
- Mentorship of student and young ordained is important. FMA and LM structure should ensure mentoring takes place for them with the Personal Companion in particular. But, it can be the young ordained who miss out on such support unless intentional mentorship is put in place for the first term at least.

- Is it possible to have a local lay person as bursar in the PMU? This has been seen as difficult up to now, due to issues of trust and access to sensitive information.
- We need to develop greater trust in our co-workers and encourage them to enhance their skills and talents.
- There is a real challenge in filling leadership roles in CLM. What are the reasons for LMs' numbers dropping? Is there a need to reconfigure the LM programme?

Recommendation Six: To explore and define a new expression of Columban missionaries: identity, language, image, etc.

- Despite declining numbers, there is a possibility to redefine our image, which is necessary in a fast-changing world. While the image may change to keep pace with modern communication technology, it is nonetheless important to adhere to our traditional missionary focus and cross-cultural charism.
- How do we present our 'brand' identity?
- We need to change our approach to mission. Limit what we do, and do it well in line with our priorities.
- Action plans are good and necessary, but much of our mission takes place in the midst of crisis, which determines our response and how plans of action are implemented.
- We are not in countries where there are a lot of vocations.

Proposals to change the Constitutions and Directory at GA2024.

In plenary session the members went through each proposed change to the constitution and directory, paying attention to the clear comments and advice given by canonist Sr. Mary Wright. Basically, the group accepted the directions she gave.

1. TMU Proposals

C. 310, D. 310.1, C.311.2, C.311.3, D.311.1, D. 311.3 **Disapprove** (because of constitutional constraints highlighted by Sr. Mary Wright).

C. 330 **Disapprove**

2. GC Proposals

D.330 **Approve**

D.404.3 **Disapprove**

3. Eamonn O'Brien Proposal

C.101 **Disapprove**

4. Noel O'Neill Proposal

C.314.1 **Disapprove**

5. Peter O'Neill Proposals

D. 206.1 **Approve**

D. 330 **Approve**

C. 338 **Approve**

C. 405.1 **Approve**

D. 405.3 **Approve**

D. 410.3 **Approve**

Appendix 1 **Approve**

Appendix 2 **Approve**

Appendix 3 **Approve**

6. Peter Woodruff Proposal

Walking Together **Disapprove**

7. PMU Proposals

Page 1. **Approve**

C. 111.2 **Approve**

C.204.2, C.207, C. 208, C. 211, C. 212.1 **Approve**

D.233.1, D. 233.2 **Approve**

D. 330 **Approve**

C. 407.2 **Approve**

8. Chris Saenz Proposals

313.3 b, c, e, **Disapprove**

C. 330 **Disapprove**

9. Joe Hardagan Proposals

C. 210 **Disapprove**

D. 212 c **Disapprove**

C. 219, D. 219 **Disapprove**

D. 223 **Disapprove**

D. 230.1 **Approve**

D. 303.1 **Disapprove**

C. 308.2, D. 308 **Disapprove**

D. 309.3 **Disapprove**

D. 313.1 **Disapprove**

C. 315 **Approve**

C. 319.1, C. 319.2, D. 319 **Disapprove**

D. 321.3 **Approve**

D. 323 **Disapprove**

C. 328 **Disapprove**

D. 330 **Approve**

D. 322.1 **Disapprove**

C. 339	Approve
C. 341.3	Disapprove
D. 342.2, D. 342.3	Disapprove
D. 405.1, D. 405.7	Disapprove
D. 405.9	Disapprove
D. 406, D.407.2	Approve

Review of Columban Formation Program in Manila.

John Boles was part of the team to review the formation programme in Manila. The others were Elvia Ortiz, CIC and Seok Jinwook, Antonio, SSC. He gave some background to the review and team that carried it out. Formation is very much connected with whether SSC has a future or not.

They found that the formation programme is working well. Most of the old complaints have been dealt with. It is impossible to fulfil all the polices as outlined in the guidelines. Look for the best solution in the present circumstances. FMA is getting difficult, which is causing chaos and irritation. If it cannot be done well, it should not be done at all. We should not wait for a quorum of students, send one alone if necessary. Recommendations were made for the improvement of formation in general.

The report came up with some conclusions and recommendations, which were discussed in small groups.

Discussion on CONCLUSIONS of the report.

Group One: Jerry, Tomas, Mona, Louie.

- Manila is now considered the most suitable and best equipped place to host the Columban international formation program and received solid approval from the recent review.
- Does this mean that Korea, which has been having its own programme for many years will now move to the Philippines?
- How long does a student need to prepare before they are sent to Manila? Students need to be well-briefed and have a good programme in order to prepare them to live in Manila. Some of the students, especially those from Fiji, are sent straight to Manila without adequate orientation in their home country. Thus, they had a hard time adapting to the new culture and environment.
- Since the pandemic no student has done CPE. It should be considered part of the formation program as it is very beneficial for the student's personal development and growth in his vocation.
- Regarding academic studies, every student should be given the choice to pursue elective courses which interest them.
- Much emphasis is given to personal growth in community, which is very important.

Discussions on RECOMMENDATIONS made in the report.

Group Two: Elbert, Liam, Dan and Pat.

- Will we continue with formation for Columban Mission priesthood? This is a big question for the GA2024 to face and to decide on.
- At the IRMU meeting in Korea in March 2023, approximately half of those present were in favour of continuing the formation program whereas the other half were not in favour.
- The formation programs in the so-called 'home Regions - ANZ, U.S.A., Britain and Ireland have been closed for many years now. The last ordination from any of these countries took place in the U.S. in 2000.
- At the 1982 G.A. it was decided to accept vocations from some countries where we had been on mission. A number of candidates joined especially from Philippines, Korea, Chile, Peru and Fiji. There was hope then that this would result in a number of ordinations yearly but the reality was that there were only a few ordinations each year.
- The remaining formation programmes are fragile and there are major questions about their viability for many reasons: - no students in the seminary in Korea, only one new candidate in the Philippines, vocation teams are not functioning well, with few if any potential candidates in the pipeline, there will be a shortage of formators very soon, the next FMA programme is set for 2024-26 and it seems to be very difficult to get RMU who are willing or able to host a programme, young people are more attracted to a conservative type of priesthood, to be "princes of the church". A reaction to the world that we live in.
- We feel for recently ordained Columbans who have much desire and enthusiasm to be on mission for a number of years into the future. The years of Columban Mission into the future may be less than they would hope for.
- Who would want to join the Columbans as it may wind up in 15-20 years' time? It would lead to depression among students. We would feel guilty if we were to accept students and then after some years close down the Society.
- The big question remains now as to whether it is prudent to accept students for formation as Columbans? An even bigger question might be, is it prudent and just to ordain those men who are now in the formation program at the present time?
- On the other hand, some in the group felt the vocation and formation programmes should be maintained, many young Columbans would see the closure of the formation program as a last resort reasons, try for a few more years and see what happens over these years: -
 - o The voice of young Columbans needs to be heard. We are young and we have hope.
 - o Are there possible candidates called to be Columbans? For example, in Fiji there are young men attracted to joining the Columbans. Parishes are a fertile ground to attract vocations yet we are departing from parishes.
 - o Even with the small number of vocations each year we will still need to continue the formation programs.
 - o Many members have been trained as formators. It was noted that there is no shortage of trained formators.

- Columbans on home holidays could promote vocations.
- The Manila Diocesan seminary accepts seminarians from Malaysia and small dioceses in the Philippines for formation in their respective dioceses. Could we integrate into this system.

Various Society and PMU matters in relation to GA 2024.

a. Society Financial update.

Liam gave a Society wide financial report. He said that in October, 2023, the bursar general, Florence Tsui, gave a report to all RMU leaders and bursars through zoom. Important points include:

- SSC wide external income has declined.
- There has been a windfall from bequests and sale of property.
- There is a decrease in general donations and bequests.
- Expenses have also declined, mainly due to Covid.

In follow up questions, Brian Vale explained how leadership dealt with the crisis of recent years. The surplus is saved in mission reserves. In the next few years expenses will increase. But operations will be self-funding, with little recourse to reserves. Trimming budgets is not enough, structural changes are also needed. The need is not to 'down size,' but 'right size!'

For the transition to be made there is a need for education for all Columbans. There is a Finance Advisory Council to General Council, which meets four times a year. One thing the FAC finds frustrating is when a new General Council comes in every six years, because there is no continuity. In response, Brian said SSC is not a business.

b. CLM Long Term international meeting in January 2024.

Monaliza reported that a CLM international meeting will take place from January 29th until February 9th, 2025 in the Philippines.

Participants will be:

- 26 lay missionaries, including two from the Central Leadership Team.
- Four ordained Columbans, Brian Vale, Vicar General plus three others to be chose from different RMUs, where an ordained member is part of the LMLT in their respective RMU.
- One former member of the LMLT will attend the meeting.
- Society Leader, Tim Mulroy will attend the second week.

The meeting will be facilitated by Paula Sgherza. In preparation, a courageous conversation has taken place monthly from September from September until December through online zoom meetings. The theme of the meeting is: '**Be Like Water.**' The LM contact persons in each RMU will send in a report by December 4th. Monaliza will circulate a questionnaire to PMU members to give her input and help her in preparing the report.

c. On-going preparation for GA2024.

The guest speaker zoom meetings will continue in December and February. Re the dialogue groups, Dan has a group going three lay people in Karachi. Elbert has also joined the group. The PMU group will continue its preparations in its regular meetings between now and May 2024. Logistically, it is the best place to do it, as due to busyness, it is difficult to meet at other times.

d. Reports from PMU for the GAPC.

Liam informed the meeting that there are two reports due; the first is the PMU annual report which needs to be submitted by November 30th, 2023. Liam is working on this. The second is the report on the PMU Pre-General Assembly Convention. This is due on February 10th, 2024. One suggestion that some PMU want to make to the GA2024 is that newly ordained be given 10 years on cross cultural mission before being recalled to home RMU. One member felt this might deter some people from come to Pakistan on a mission assignment; maybe six years is more practical.

e. Sharing from Brian Vale.

Brian Vale, as VG, gave input on the present state of SSC from the perspective of General Council.

He said that our mission priorities are more relevant than ever, especially the ecological crisis and migrant crisis, both are which are strongly highlighted by Pope Francis. The are also Columban priorities, along with inter-faith dialogue. Migration is causing a major movement of people across the world. The covid pandemic caused a major upheaval in how we live and interact. It impacted greatly on the mental health of people. The future hopes that people had were dented.

Other points Brian made include:

- LMs, co-workers and ordained are working together. This must continue and deepen for the sake of the Society.
- How do we give our values to our co-workers? We need on-going conversion. We must witness in our daily lives and educate those around us by networking internationally.
- Encourage JPIC & IRD.
- LMs are engaged in international and internal migration work.
- Climate change will displace people.
- Personnel: South America and Oceania regions continue to integrate. It has moved quicker in Oceania. There has been resistance in both places.
- Ordained numbers are on the decline. LM numbers are also stark.
- Myanmar: the military are trying to control education. There are two ordained deacons from Myanmar.
- Safe guarding: there has been an online training programme. SSC wide policy and protocols have been updated. Each RMU will now do likewise. The society receives on average one allegation every month. They are mostly historical, and against a small number of members.
- Laycom is excellent for communicating what is going on in the LM world.
- Visas continue to be a problem in some countries we work in, with Ireland proving particularly difficult.
- The accompaniment of young members is important, and needs to be done.
- Intercultural living: General Council has done their own processing of inter cultural dynamics. The PMU is a small group, now with new dynamics. There is a need to keep adjusting.
- It is very challenging for young members to take on leadership roles.
- General Council supports and collaborates with the China Formation Committee.