

## Taiwan Mission Unit (TMU) Pre-GA Convention Report

The TMU held its convention on September 14 and 15, 2023 at the Missions Etrangeres De Paris (MEP) central house in Hualien City after its 8-day annual retreat. There were 13 participants: 8 LMs - Kim Jung Woong Bosco, Lee Jiyoung Christina, Bae Sihyeon Teresa, Sherryl Lou Capili, Jhoanna Resari, Joan Yap, Reina Mosqueda, Febie Gonzales and 5 ordained - Salustino Villalobos Mondragon, Ryu Sunjong Andrea, Taaremon Matauea, Nguyen Van Hung Peter, Seok Jinwook Antonio. John Boles (Director of Britain) and Kang Seungwon Joseph (General Councilor) were also present as observers. They joined the small group discussions and shared helpful answers to certain questions. Towards the end of the convention, they were also given time to share their thoughts and observations.

Two months prior to the convention, the committee (She, Sunjong, and Salu) facilitated a 2-part consultation using Google Forms for everyone to share their ideas. Part 1 consultation was about expectations and to know what the members want to achieve during the convention. They were also asked about what important topics they want to discuss with regard to Columban life and mission within the TMU and the Society, and what do they want for the international Society to attend to during the GA 2024 apart from the six recommendations from the IRMU 2023. The Part 2 consultation was about the six recommendations asking them what they think are the issues and concerns that are associated with each recommendation. They were also asked to formulate questions they want for the group to discuss and answer based on each recommendation. They were also asked how they want each recommendation be written or edited if they think there is a need to do so. The committee formulated the agenda based on the feedback from the members.

Small group discussions of the recommendations were based on the information that the TMU received on the IRMU recommendations, including the TMU feedback on the consultation facilitated by the TMU Pre-GA Convention Committee and feedback from the canon lawyer on proposals to the Constitutions and Directory. The initial report of the survey for the external review by Dr. Evans was also sent to the group prior to the meeting. A facilitator, timekeeper, reporter and secretary have been assigned per group. The plenary discussion focused on the group's report on what the TMU wants to bring to the GA 2024 for discussion.

### **DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATION 1 - To create a culture of accountability supported by rigorous policy procedures and ongoing monitoring.**

We recommend that RMUs agree on a system that would allow them to create a culture of trust, transparency and accountability i.e. to put in place structures for discussion and approval of plans of action and budget, facilitate annual reviews, and enhance community life and collaboration. We think that RMUs need to identify and address what are the existing attitudes, practices and structures in the Society that hinder or discourage the practice of sharing responsibility, accountability and collaboration.

Our knowledge of regional structures is limited. In a regional structure, one person (i.e. Regional Director) can make decisions for members. This can negatively impact members. It may have been suitable with a larger membership in the past, but with our present reality, maybe the regional structure is not applicable anymore.

The good experience in the mission units can be a good model for the Society as a direction to go in terms of structures. This can help us face our current circumstances. It is important for SSC to foster trust and faith in each other. What makes the MU structures attractive are: all members can participate, be accountable, and consulted in making decisions. Frequency of meetings and physical proximity i.e. missionaries living/working near each other, can be helpful. However, it was also observed that not all Columbans are open to how we do things in the TMU. Some even left with negative experiences. We must be mindful of the burden of holding multiple roles to function as a mission unit – especially with our smaller number.

We also hope for the GA to pay closer attention to growth and healthy formation for future Columbans. The Society needs to proactively facilitate members' growth and provide accompaniment to help members to be aware of relevant issues. People can be indifferent to what's going on in other members' personal life. How do we respond to someone who needs assistance with their personal issues? Personal growth is about an individual's maturity. If a person is set on doing things his way, undergoing courses will not help if that person is immature. Formation is important. Some Columbans have an attitude of "I do things my way", "I do what I want". It's a matter of, whether they feel a sense of belonging to the whole. If a person is not open, our ability to help is limited. Getting to know each other, knowing what is going on with others, sharing in monthly meetings are vital.

**DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATION 2 - 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 the review.**

We affirm that JPIC and IRD are the Society's priorities and members have committed to the priorities in their own ways. It can also be said that JPIC and IRD are our way of life. However, we are challenged to move forward to a collective and pragmatic ways of doing JPIC and IRD in the Society. To do this, we think that each RMU should set up clear goals for the JPIC and IRD ministries. Members also need to set up goals and means for his/her involvement in JPIC and IRD of the RMU. Moreover, the RMU needs to accompany and facilitate members who are not ready to be involved in the JPIC and IRD.

Question: How can the external review be executed when local RMUs have different JPIC and IRD issues, realities and contexts?

There was a comment that we need to choose places to prioritize JPIC and IRD. One also says that this ministry can be done in parishes because they are very good foundation for

priests to do a lot of things for JPIC because they have a community and the resources. These priorities can be integrated in parish work. One also says that we need to define what 'priority' actually means. (e.g. will all Columbans need to be involved?). There is also a danger in having a full-time JPIC coordinator i.e. other members not actively involved. How can an RMU say JPIC is a priority when only one or a few members are involved?

Aside from this, beyond ministry work, we need to look at our core belief, what motivates our thinking and these will be carried out as actions. If we make 'care for creation as one of our priorities, how can all Columbans integrate, adapt and promote 'responsible environmental stewardship' in our personal life, ministry, and RMU? Ministry to promote care for creation is a personal inclination. One needs to take initiative to start and it would be a challenge if the heart is not there. One member expressed an issue with JPIC and IRD as the Society's priority, comes across as NGOs and limiting. This needs to be reviewed. One member was reminded of the migrant centers. In the beginning, he actually saw himself working like being in an NGO, but later on, he has changed his mindset. Another member shared that NGOs actually approach religious congregations for assistance in their work for JPIC and IRD. So having these as Columban priorities is helpful for other groups, like NGOs, to know. One commented that using the word priority is 'a bit heavy', but agrees that it is a way of life

**DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATION 3 - To facilitate an independent review and assessment of the vocation programs based on internal and external data, trends, and other congregational plans with a view to creating a strategic plan based on the outcomes.**

We affirm this recommendation. The review needs to provide practical recommendations (e.g. allocation of resources, concrete changes to address the challenges which would be identified in the review).

From the TMU feedback, there were questions on the purpose and nature of the review, as well as how to improve or continue vocation of ordained and LMs. There was also a comment that the suspension of the seminary, like what the CLT proposed for the sending program, would mean closure of the Society; one member asked, "How do we feel about closing the Society?"

The direction of the future of Society is related to vocation. If the Society sees that there is a future for us, then vocation continues. But the Society must be willing to go through major changes for this to be possible. If the direction is to close, then there is no point in continuing vocation. The future of vocation is connected to the decision which direction the Society is going.

During the GA, it is critical to make a decision about the direction of the future of the Society. Discussions can be focused at identifying what changes we need to make and explore possibilities. The GA also needs to consider the results of the reviews in their discussions.

To address the lack of personnel, we can find a better way to run vocations programs with a small number of people. One says that the review is aimed at how to improve formation and not closing the program. We should not be restricted by the data showing our decreasing number. One says that vocation program needs to change in order to have a future. This can be a priority (rather than JPIC and IRD). The Society needs to take this seriously. One says that there is an issue that in some countries where Columban are, they have a passive presence (e.g. Australia, NZ), the perspective on vocation is rigid, many do not want to change. We need to be more flexible to extend our invitation to others.

One says that Maryknoll experiences similar realities as the Columbans. In Taiwan, they went from 70 priests in the beginning to 5-6 priests. But in other countries, Maryknoll is flourishing. It is important to look to other congregations to explore possibilities. One says it doesn't make sense to stop the CLM sending program. If there is no LM Coordinator, this would be understandable.

#### **DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATIONS 4 - 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.**

We affirm this recommendation. This is in line with the movement of the universal church to work together towards synodality. The GA needs to discuss and recommend a model that encourages or fosters inclusivity and involvement of LMs and coworkers in the Society, working towards a sustainable partnership. For partnership to be sustainable, we need each other i.e. ordained, LMs and coworkers.

We need to really define the kind of partnership that fosters growth as stated in this recommendation. And, it is important to recognize or identify models of good practice and attitudes of partnership as experienced in the RMUs and in the whole Society. During the CLM International Meeting in January, it is crucial for the LMs to identify the direction and plans of the CLM including making a decision on the sending program. We should explore ways to start to promote and practice partnership in formation.

With the decreasing number of ordained and LMs, we can consider reconfiguring our leadership teams in RMUs. One idea can be having one leadership team of ordained and LMs and not to separate them i.e. Coordinating Committee/Regional Council and LMLT. This idea may be possible in a Mission Unit setting but we are not sure for regional structure. Structures of Mission Unit can be changed.

There is also a need to reconfigure the CLM. Are reviews still necessary? We have our annual reviews together in the TMU. It would be more practical to remove this from the CLM structures to lessen responsibilities for the leadership team. This needs to be a part of discernment process of CLM during the CLM International Meeting.

The Society can explore ways to practice partnership in formation. We can look to other congregations' formation programs (e.g. One missionary group holds joint formation program/orientation program in one location; they go through one year together, students continue on their formation, while LMs go on mission after completing the program).

**DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATION 5 - To create a culture of mentoring and support for leadership that is shared and sustainable and includes co-workers.**

We affirm this recommendation. This affirms the TMU practice of mentoring LMs and priests. This also recognizes the work of LMs and co-workers in the Society.

On one hand, what leadership roles are being referred to here? We need to clarify if this refers to creating a culture which means training people for leadership or creating structures which means changing the Constitutions and Directory.

Not all people have innate leadership skills but can be trained, create a mentoring culture, to form leaders. There needs to be openness on both sides (mentor and mentee).

Question 1: How can we effectively promote and incentivize mentorship within the Society to ensure a culture of shared support for leadership development among ordained, lay missionaries and co-workers?

Questions 2: What strategies can we implement to foster inclusivity and diversity in our mentoring program, ensuring that all members have equitable access to mentorship opportunities and that diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into our leadership support initiatives?

In the IRMU meeting, this recommendation came from discussions of decreasing number of ordained members, while younger ordained are hesitant to take on leadership roles. One reason was because nobody was mentoring them, and the issue of willingness of experienced members to mentor. There were also comments about wanting to give up roles and how there are those who cannot let go of their leadership roles.

One says that based on TMU experience, we learn after taking on leadership roles. One says he wasn't trained when he became a director of a center. He took the initiative to undergo training. One says we need to ensure the person for the role has sufficient skills. One member asks, what is the meaning of the LMCLT's role in the central leadership if, after giving recommendations to the GC, the GC can change their mind? This needs to be addressed. One also asks, which roles can be given to co-workers? This requires certain formation for co-workers for leadership e.g. can non-Catholic co-workers be an IRD Coordinator? Can co-workers with no background about the Columbans be on leadership roles? One says that we are legally-bound/restricted i.e. priests still make final decisions.

In Britain, every single department is run by co-workers and lay missionaries, due to the nature of the region i.e. Britain exists to make money. There are some congregations who have lay people handle important roles. It is possible for lay people to be in leadership.

The result of the consultation by the canon lawyer showed that our proposals were not accepted due to canonical issues, there is a limitation of how much LMs and co-workers can take on roles. Are we willing to do something about it? Are we willing to change our identity?

Co-workers are professionals with specific skills and training. What does this recommendation mean with the word “mentoring”? If this refers to changing the structures, then we will need to change the Constitutions. If so, this recommendation would be meaningful. This is worth exploring with a canon lawyer. During the GA, will members be open to creating a new entity not bound by canon law to allow ordained, LMs and co-workers share leadership? If we are to promote leadership for LMs and co-workers, how does the Society see this being realized?

#### **DISCUSSION ON RECOMMENDATION 6 - To explore and define a new expression of Columban missionaries: identity, language, image, etc.**

We support this recommendation to explore a new expression of Columban missionaries. Good communication is important to reach out to people to be aware of our work. Language needs to be authentic and we need to share concrete stories over the years. The most important is the Columban identity (language and image change). It is important to define our group identity -- a sense of belonging and shared characteristics that we have as a group.

How do we identify our shared characteristics? We are overseas missionaries, intercultural community, we live in partnership with lay people. This will create curiosity and would want to know more about us.

There are many Columban websites and social media platforms to share our stories. The problem is gathering content. In the TMU, we can share our stories to people. We show the intercultural living and partnership between ordained and LMs. People might be interested to know more about us (e.g. what Peter O’Neill, Hung, and Neil Magill have started). We can put emphasis to this. We can use different tools that are available to express this. It includes language, media tools to connect and engage to support in our mission.

It is important to pick up trends, current problems in society we need to address and be involved in (e.g. LGBTQ, human trafficking, etc.); Instead of saying “care for creation” – we can consider focusing on specific issues i.e. responding to survivors of a typhoon and connect it to this cause. Use words that appeal to the emotions of people.

What does it mean to be a Columban missionary in this present century? How do we want to be identified in the next years? The GA will define this based on the decisions they will

make. One member affirms the Society's attitude in accepting newness in promoting Columbans; there is a need to be more inclusive; with certain attitudes towards change and the generation gap among old and young Columbans, it is important to accept newness.

How do we accept the change? how can we work together despite our limitations? We need to look for ways how to work in partnership; important for the ordained to keep on working together with lay missionaries and co-workers.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTIONS AND DIRECTORY (C&D)**

### **Chapter 1: Nature, Purpose and Spirit of the Society**

Comments: Direct quotations from the bible cannot be changed. We can look at other versions of the bible for more inclusive language; Can add a footnote. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

#### **C101:**

Comments: The proposal limits the Society's focus i.e. Asia; Better not limit ourselves. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

### **Section II. C.111.2. In favor of the proposal (13-0-0).**

#### **C.204.2**

Comments: The proposal states that the Coordinating Committee has authority to make decisions. Mission Units (MU) are under the SG i.e. SG makes decisions in consultation with the CC. There are sections in the C&D that covers MU procedures. This section is limited to the regional structure.

Suggestion: to include a note to refer to C.340 for procedures applicable to MUs.

MU structures can be changed. See if GC approves it.

Keep the original text. Final decisions of temporary members are from regions. If MU needs this, structures can be revised and proposed to the GC. Approved (13-0-0).

#### **D.206.1**

Comments: In Section 1. C.101. – the full name of the Society is stated. The proposal is just an editorial change.

New proposal: In 1.C.101, to add: (Society) beside the official name and use Society for the rest of the document to be consistent. Approved (13-0-0).

#### **C210.1**

The group doesn't see the confusion. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

### **D212 (c)**

Comments: In this section, 2 RMUs are involved i.e. Sending and Receiving RMUs of FMA students. It was confirmed that the Regional Director referred to here is the director of the Receiving RMU.

### **C219.**

Comments: Associate priests have Agreements with the Society. After 6 years, they cannot renew. The proposal speaks of matters that are applicable for priests who wish to be incardinated to the Society. This proposal raises the question (similar to CLM), how can the Society support associate priests?

Keep the original text. Associate priests who are interested to extend beyond their Agreement and avail the benefits as stated in the proposal can follow the procedure to become full members of the Society. Approved (13-0-0).

### **C223.**

Comments: The proposal and the suggestion of the canon lawyer are not 'law' terms i.e. "mutually respectful and trusting dialogue." The proposed change doesn't affect the process. This can be placed in other Society documents e.g. Society Manual of Policies and Procedures. As the canon lawyer stated, this proposal seems to be loaded with mistrust. It can be problematic. Who determines if a member is 'not trusting'? Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

### **D.230.1**

Comments: This refers to the rule of the Church. The purpose is to enforce this because not many priests follow this. Need to consider policies of local church, practices may vary in different dioceses. Priests need to follow the policy of the diocese they are in. The proposal contradicts the practice in the Hsinchu diocese i.e. 3rd and 4th offerings go to the diocese.

### **C233.**

Comments: It was clarified that the proposal is to include MUs. In a region, if a member is invited to take courses – the original section is followed, this is for courses taken less than 1 year. In mission units, decisions on ongoing education needs the approval of the SG. It was suggested to add a note in this section i.e. C.f. section on MU procedures.

### **D233.1**

In favor of the proposal to change "Regional administration" to "Regional/Mission Unit Administration" (13-0-0).

### **D.233.2**

Section not applicable to MU. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).



### **C.303**

Keep original and place the proposal in the Society's Manual of Policies and Procedures (If not yet written). Approved (13-0-0).

### **C.308.2**

Comments: After the GC is elected, they cannot make decisions within one month. Transition (turnover) is 1 month before the incoming SG takes office. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

**D.309.3** Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

### **C.310**

Comments: Who are counted in the RMUs? This proposal is about the right to participate and is only counting number of RMU members. The canon lawyer suggests to have a clear definition of the CLM in place in the C&D; can be a footnote in the C&D. Those who have the right to vote can be identified.

To keep the proposals as written for C.310 and D310.1. Approved (13-0-0).

The following is to be presented as an addition to C.310. and D.310.3 in response to the suggestion of the Canon Lawyer.

Add to C&D:

D.310.3 Columban Lay Missionaries are women and men who are under contract with the Society to serve as lay missionaries in accordance with the Society's Columban Lay Mission Policy Handbook, and who are assigned to Regions and Mission Units by the Superior General.

### **C311.2**

Comments: In light of the movement of the Church towards full participation in the spirit of synodality (i.e. equal rights to vote) but not about membership. This proposal is not possible under the current Constitutions. There is no harm to keep the proposal as is and present to the GA.

### **C311.2; D.311.1; D.311.3**

- Same comments from lawyer; same feedback from TMU as in C311.2.

### **C313.1 to add D.313.1**

- It was noted that the canon lawyer mentioned that details of each ballot should be secret. It is only the final results of the ballots which are communicated to the membership, without any information of the numbers of votes in favour of each candidate.

In favor of the amended proposal as suggested by the lawyer i.e. ““The President of the General Assembly shall appoint two scrutineers and a secretary from among the members of the Assembly, in accordance with c. 173 (CIC).” Approved (12-1-0).

### **C.313.3**

Comments: According to the canon lawyer this is possible, but this needs to be approved before GA, if the Society wants to have this implemented in the upcoming GA. One member expressed to just remove all these. Seniority doesn't speak of suitability. This is not in the canonical tradition. It was clarified that this is for the final decision if votes are tied; and that there would've been discernment already done among delegates about the candidates' suitability before reaching this kind of scenario. It's a safety net for such a scenario. In favor of the proposal (12-1-0).

### **C314.1**

Comments: The canon lawyer gave valid points. One member expressed he believes any member can be eligible. Keep the original text. Approved (13-0-0).

### **C315**

Comment: Proposal is just to clarify that the SG referred here is the newly-elected SG. In favor of proposal (13-0-0).

### **C319.1**

Comments: Suggestion from canon lawyer: “this should simply state: “The General Council is made up of the Vicar General and two other Councillors.” The fact is that the General Superior is not a member of his council. He does not advise himself or give himself consent to act.” Both the original and proposal are incorrect. This section is referring to the General Council not the Superior General. In favor of the suggestion made by the canon lawyer (13-0-0).

Due to time constraints, the rest of the proposals were not discussed. The group agreed to include this item in the agenda for another meeting but when the group was consulted again regarding the continuation of discussion, the group expressed to consider what the canon lawyer shared in her feedback to the proposals.

The group also had a discussion on the following question: **HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF THE TMU AND THE SOCIETY?**

## **FUTURE OF THE TMU**

There number of TMU members will be lesser. At present we have 6 LMs and 5 ordained. There might be lesser LMs after the CLM International meeting. The composition of the TMU will change (e.g. majority in terms of nationality). TMU might be gearing towards having only 1 or 2 ministry priorities which are more focused and with clearer goals. We should be intentional in our Plans of Action to maximize our resources. We can do better and work on

new ideas. One mentions that we can let go of the Hope Workers' Center (HWC), other centers can replace the services of the HWC. It seems like the missionary spirit is not present in HWC, same as ministry with the aborigines i.e. we're just maintaining these ministries.

One says that we will be engaged in ministries with migrants, social justice, pastoral services, care for creation. LMs will be more intentionally involved with these ministries. Care for creation can be integrated in ministry with aborigines. Members can be engaged more in IRD i.e. the diocese is looking for people to work in this ministry; more collaboration with the local church in this ministry.

One says we can continue working in parishes wherein work with migrants and aborigines can be integrated in this ministry. We can also do more in parishes for mission awareness and we can be open to new collaboration for vocation promotion.

We can enhance living out partnership between ordained and lay missionaries by working more closely in our ministries. We can also see members becoming active in using digital media to share our stories in mission.

Mentoring is to be expected – and that it is not a responsibility of only a few members. We can also see that TMU will be more engaged in collaboration with other RMUs, becoming more involved in projects in line with the priorities of the whole Society.

With our experience of partnership and practices of shared responsibility among ourselves, it would be easier for us to adapt to the major changes that may need to happen in the Society. With lesser members, administrative roles need to lessen. The TMU has good structures and partnership. The Society can invite new members to the TMU.

## **FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY**

One says to be hopeful but also believes that there will be closures in the Society. Looking at the young ordained, hopeful that the Society will still continue in 10-20 years' time. We evolve, we learn from other congregations – how they have adapted/changed. We can adjust how we do things based on our own situation.

Which structures are sustainable? Is amalgamation a good direction for RMUs? We do not know enough to say if this works. In Britain, they cannot amalgamate with Ireland due to their government requirements for entities that fundraise. Some structures have to be changed or assessed e.g. experience of amalgamation in South America was not positive. Regional structures will change to smaller structures i.e. MU

In regions like the Oceania, co-workers are invited to work in different regional priorities. We are hopeful that CLM continues.

There will be lesser RMUs and missionaries not spread out in different countries (e.g. having 1 LM assigned in one country or RMU members spread far apart, etc. are not sustainable). RMUs having focused ministries vs members doing their own thing.

Society coming up with something creative. Our identity is important. How do we present ourselves to the world?

**What other topics do we want the international Society to attend to during the GA 2024 – topics that will have relevance for Columban life and international mission for the next several years?**

**Statement:** That the GC present concrete models for restructuring the SSC before the General Assembly. These models, of necessity, will detail how to strategically allocate resources for Columban mission.