

PMU Annual Report 2023

The PMU gathered for our annual retreat, followed by our pre-GA2024 Convention, in the Monastery of the Angels, Karachi on November 9-18, 2023; John Boles was present as retreat director and convention facilitator, as was Brian Vale who was on visitation on behalf of GC. This was a good opportunity to reflect on and assess the well-being of the PMU at this point in time and coincides with me being in the role of coordinator for one year.

Although our numbers (eight) have remained stable over the recent number of years, nonetheless significant changes have occurred over the last year within the group. We are still eight (one LM (second term) and seven ordained) and one co-worker, but the make-up of the group has changed; we are now four Filipinos, two Irish and one each from Fiji and New Zealand and a Pakistani co-worker. Some of the significant realities of the PMU include: -

- **Morale.** Morale is high in the group and there is a good energy in the PMU; this is helped by our regular meetings (a minimum of six per year), all are preceded by a Review of life. And other social gatherings together – St. Columban’s day, Christmas, Easter etc. as well as being present together at the bi-monthly diocesan meetings in Hyderabad.
- **PMU Priorities.** There is a large buy-in to the mission priorities we have discerned for the PMU- tribal ministry, JPIC, IRD, formation of people. Six of us (Pat, Mona, Elbert, Louie, Jerry, Dan) are directly involved in tribal ministry, primarily with the Parkari Kohli indigenous group, but also with the Punjabi and Sindhi Bheel groups as well. One (Tomas) is involved in on-going formation as director of Joti Centre, the diocesan education and cultural Centre. Tomas is also the coordinator for the tribal ministry in Hyderabad diocese, appointed by the Bishop. Two (Danish and Liam) are involved in JPIC/IRD and administration.
- **New Ministries.** We differ from much of the Society where the main concerns are diminishment, retirement, closure of ministries etc. Here, with the youthful energy of two newly ordained who arrived in the last six months, two more who are under six years ordained and a LM in her second term, we have agreed to the Bishop of Hyderabad’s request to establish a new parish catering primarily for Parkari Kohlis (began on July 1, 2023). This is in addition to working in a tribal parish the Columbans have worked in for 40 years and a new ministry in Karachi, helping Karachi Archdiocese strengthen its tribal ministry. On-going formation through Joti Centre, JPIC/IRD, house rehabilitation for 2022 flood victims and administration are also on-going.
- **FMA.** We have submitted an FMA proposal to GC for consideration to host an FMA programme from August 2024-May 2026. I am under no illusion, given the number of ministries we are involved in and only eight members in the PMU, that running an FMA programme well, will be a big ask for us and a big responsibility. But there is unanimous agreement in the group to wanting to host a programme, feeling that it is the best, if not

only way, of getting possible future appointments. Also, we have many experiences of running a good programme, the most recent two programmes we hosted had five students and four of them are now back ordained and in the PMU, a high success rate.

- **Inter-cultural living.** The recent movements in and out of the PMU has led to a changed cultural reality, for the first time Caucasians are in the minority (three); the majority are now from high context cultures, which have a communication style based on body language, tone and overall context, while low context cultures are more explicit and straightforward in their communication. This is still a work in progress for us as we grapple with how best to understand each other in terms of decision making, discernment, voting, changing dynamics etc.
- **Context of Pakistan.** The situation in Pakistan is particularly bad – economic slow-down, massive depreciation of the Rupee, political instability, sky-rocketing inflation, extremism which includes targeting of minorities, climate change induced extreme weather events, very slow rehabilitation in areas affected by the flooding of 2022. In fact, since I first came to Pakistan on FMA in 1994, this is the worst state of affairs I have seen the country in. This context makes our efforts even more difficult to be effective.
- **Financial Constraints.** For the last two years or more, non-registered organisations are not allowed to transfer foreign currency into Pakistan from abroad. This has caused us some problems and we have had to find alternative means of getting money in – through the Bishop’s account (limited), carrying cash back when returning to Pakistan etc. The Bursar General has been helpful in facilitating the ‘non-orthodox’ ways of financing mission here.
- **PMU Plan of Action.** The PMU Plan of Action has been under process for the last number of months, we will complete it in early 2024.
- **Future leadership.** I am confident that we are preparing young members to be capable leaders of tomorrow. Already, a number of the younger members hold responsible posts in the PMU – vice-coordinator, bursar, parish priest, FMA director, LM coordinator – and this experience will stand them in good stead in future leadership roles in the PMU and wider Society.

SWOT analysis on the wider Society and GA2024

I have always been immersed in the reality of the PMU, without too much time for the bigger Society-wide view; the IRMU meeting in March, 2023 has certainly changed that for me. Reading the 12 RMU reports and 18 CA reports and engaging in conversations that flowed from them in the meeting, I feel I have had a crash course in coming to see and understand that bigger picture. My assessment is a deeply fragile Society, even worse than the already stark statistics would indicate; in fact, much of what we do, in our present mode of operation, is simply unsustainable even into the near future. To have arrived at this point means that a significant amount of denial

of reality has been operative in the Society for quite some time, and, for me, was present during the IRMU meeting too. Denial can be described as “not living in ‘actual reality’, rather living in a ‘preferable’ reality”; it is crucial that GA2024 lives in the ‘actual reality’ of our Society today and accordingly, makes the difficult decisions necessary.

Strengths: -

- We have over a century of experience of overcoming difficult, sometimes seemingly unsurmountable difficulties, on the Society level and local level.
- Over the last 30 years, a strong partnership and teamwork of LM, ordained and co-worker has been built up;
- the energy of younger members, who clearly see a future for the Society;
- the commitment and professionalism of many co-workers e.g., in the areas of finance, administration, JPIC, IRD, safeguarding etc.
- networking with faith and civil society groups on priority issues such as migration, the climate crisis, biodiversity loss;
- appreciating the missionary credibility which the Society has in many places across the world.

The future of the Society – whatever shape it will be or how long it will be - must be built on these foundations.

Weaknesses: -

- We have been operating out of a position of denial for some time – not willing or able to see the stark reality we are in; this has prevented us from taking timely and necessary interventions. I feel denial is still part of our deliberations and preparations for GA2024.
- Inability and refusal by some members to see and accept some of the stark realities facing our vocation and formation programmes – drastic drop in numbers of young people showing interest in joining, ineffectiveness of much of our vocation promotion efforts, scarcity of future formators, less than adequate screening, lack of pastoral and FMA placements. These stark realities point to the conclusion that our formation programmes – CLM and seminarian – are unsustainable into the future.
- In the past, some delegates at Columban international meetings and General Assemblies have been less than well prepared.

Opportunities: -

- The IRMU meeting, delayed because of Covid 19, happened just over a year out from the start of GA2024, which I think resulted in a sharper focus on preparation for the GA.
- The ‘External Reviews’ which were recommended by the IRMU delegates have the potential to be a significant catalyst for change at GA2024 and taking the hard decisions

needed, provided the Reviews are given the prominence by the delegates which is required.

- The high participation rate, 75%, in the survey circulated as part of the 'External Reviews' shows substantial interest, commitment and desire for the GA to be successful from the membership. The high participation rate in the online 'Guest Speaker' series echoes this as well.
- GA2024 is a crucial moment in the life of the Society to make changes to the RMU administrative and leadership structure, which are unsustainable with the numbers we have. It is also a crucial moment to courageously and honestly assess the viability of our student and CLM vocation and formation programmes.

Threats: -

- Sometimes the newly elected steering committee at a GA can dismiss much of the work of the GAPC and introduce a different direction. This would undo much of the good preparation work for GA2024, especially in relation to the suggestions from the 'External Reviews' report.
- Not facing up to the difficult reality we are facing and taking difficult decisions, postponing decisions or pushing them into the future, is not a viable option in our present situation.
- In the voting for the new GC, delegates often vote along traditional and unspoken political lines; this may not be the better way to get the GC needed for the task at hand.
- Lack of 'joined-up thinking' in our decisions and non-decisions e.g., if two or three members of the PMU are appointed back to their home regions, then some of our ministries will collapse here; we simply cannot keep everything going in light of the stark statistics we are being presented with.

Even in the stark reality of the statistics placed before us over recent months, we are not without hope. By courageously facing up to our weaknesses and mitigating the threats in our path, we have enough strengths and opportunities available to us to turn 'courageous conversations' into 'courageous decisions'. We have no greater inspiration than that of St. Columban, the great missionary, whose feast day we celebrate today.

Liam O'Callaghan

November 23, 2023