

Regional Director's Report on the Philippine Region 2023

The alleviation of pandemic-related stress and anxiety has brought us relief. The easing of restrictions allowed people to regain a sense of personal freedom and reconnection with the others. It brought us to a more normal social interaction. We are now in the 'new normal' after the covid 19 crisis. Changes and adaptations have become part of our daily lives. In our ministries and in many of our activities, we have adopted hybrid work, learning and meeting models.

Technology has really played integral role in many aspects of what we do as Columban missionaries in the Philippine Region and in connection to the wider Columban Society. The value of an online system for our meetings, communications, collaborations and even-decision making is immense. This online platform breakS down geographical barriers, allowing us to connect with the other members of the region, who in their conditions are not able to travel and be physically present but share insights and coordinate efforts efficiently. Besides that this online accesibility reduces travel costs and time constraints, it enables us more frequent and consistent communications and accomodates diverse schedules enabling some members of the region outside of the country to join our regional meetings and celebrations in spite of time differences. Overall, the use of online systems now is enhancing the effectiveness and connection of the region and the wider Columban Society.

MY REFLECTION / SHARING

Stepping into the role of Regional Director at this time when the society is going through transition is very challenging and yet it is an opportunity for growth. I have grown into seeing more and seeing deeper the Columban Mission in the Philippine Region and also a much bigger perspective of Columban Mission society-wide.

There is much to be affirmed in the Columban Society's serious effort, dedication and commitment to God's mission through the Columban Mission. There is clarity in our Columban Priorities and it is accompanied and implemented with a good Plan of Action in the RMUs. The Columban Society is blessed with a strong partnership and

collaboration. But we as a society is grappling with the declining number of personnel and aging membership that threatens the society to phase out and cease to continue as a Columban missionary society.

We have been in serious discernment process and conversations on how to go about with the Columban Mission everytime we have general assemblies and international Columban meetings. We as a society has been listening to the Spirit flow that directs us as to which direction our Columban Missionary Society should go while dealing with the actual change that is needed to be done. We need to be more courageous and not passive or resistant, creative and not just for the maintenance of our ministries and programs. Like in the area of vocation, are we opening up to invite candidates outside of our mission areas?

Looking at the society, like in the past 20 years, there have been much change happening. Although we now have lesser numbers we also have more partnerships. A new reality has unfolded for us where both members and partners are involved in mission. We have become more inclusive and participative, and we have empowered people through our ministries. And with all these positive changes, we are still fit for the purpose. Our numbers may be decreasing but our missionary spirit remains quite vibrant. From that experience of the IRMU Meeting and the way the connection is being kept going and strengthened in the society level, I would say that our mission and our cross-cultural identity is still strong. This is a manifestation of God working in and among His people. And so we will continue to listen to the Spirit in us and among us, because the reality we are experiencing now is also part of God's design. We need to be open to be influenced by the Spirit in our present reality through which God is, indeed, speaking to us.

The Philippine Region along with the many RMUs is for the Columban Mission to continue. In order to continue, proactive measures are essential. This includes intentional recruitment strategies to attract younger individuals to join the Columban Society. To create structures that would need few personnel. And assess ministries and structures that would need sufficient supply of personnel like formation and

training/orientation of seminarians and candidates for CLM. We also need to strengthen our technology for outreach, collaborate with other groups or organizations locally and widely to sustain and expand our mission.

At the crossroad a new Columban story is emerging and unfolding brought about by changes. In the everchanging seasons, we paused and are asked by the Spirit to choose - "Life or Death"; we choose LIFE.

PERSONNEL

Currently there are 21 regular priest members in the region plus 1 on temporary assignment here, 4 Lay Missionaries, 3 FMA students and 11 students are in the seminary doing Theology, Philosophy and Language. During this school year in 2023, 1 Filipino has newly joined our seminary formation program. In April, 2 out of our 12 seminarians were aggregated as temporary members and two post-FMA students were ordained deacons in September and had returned to their home region and Mission Unit where they were appointed in October. The Philippine Region is grateful to have Jude Genovia assigned here since May and he is now in Malate Parish. While KwangKyu Ji is currently training in Korea in view to working in the International Formation Program in Manila. John Leydon is currently on an indefinite leave to recuperate in Ireland after having been sick for few months in the Philippines. In the coming year when the new appointments will take effect, 2 members of the Philippine Region will be re-assigned to other regions. The shortage of personnel has become a more pressing issue in the region this time. It is given that there are distinct and different ministries that have to be sustained by the RMU because those ministries are effective means to promote and integrate the Society's priority ministries. How do we address this in terms of personnel management by the society?

PARTNERSHIP

The total number of employees in the region now who are on our payroll is currently reduced to 27. In the last few months, four of our Columban full-time employees had resigned and retired. We will not be hiring to replace all the vacated posts but we need

to find a full-time secretary to the regional director. Meantime, the region has a temporary secretary. A bookkeeper is also needed to be hired for Mindanao area due to the vacancy brought by retirement.

In the Region we had grouped our employees into non-office maintenance staff and the office staff who are the co-workers. Our Co-workers are those who work with us quite closely in our various ministries like JPIC, Vocation, Mission Promotion and Fundraising, Lay Mission, Archives, Finance and House Management. They have been participating actively in our Columban meetings, celebrations & gatherings and are more engaged and involved in the affairs and mission of the region. With our former lay missionaries taking on a job in the region, their understanding of the Columban mission values, objectives and identity, enhances collaboration and commitment.

The partnership between the ordained, Lay Missionaries and co-workers in our missionary work is a dynamic collaboration that enriches our Columban mission journey. The missionary challenge and the hope that lie ahead of us in our Columban mission is the journey on the path of synodality. Our collaboration reflects the inclusive nature of missionary work where each one's unique contributions, diverse skills and perspectives are collectively shared. This enhances the effectiveness and relevance of God's mission in our time.

INTERCULTURALITY

The region now is consist of 10 different nationalities and cultural groups from Korea, Philippines, Peru, Myanmar, Fiji, Kiribati, Rabi, Ireland, USA & Australia. In both of our Columban houses in Patag, Cagayan de Oro and in Singalong, Manila the regular Monday gathering, the Mass for Vocation every first Monday of the month and the cultural/national event celebrations have been made to be an occasion for the region to develop and strengthen the cohesion of a multicultural region, which is a character and identity of our Columban Society. We have a regional calendar of the most important events or day of each of our cultural / national groups which is celebrated during Monday gathering that includes the Columban Sisters, their postulants and novices and

the co-workers as well . All our cultural or national events have been livestreamed for the rest in the Philippine region and even outside to join. This has become a 'gathering together' event that is being looked forward to and being enjoyed in the region.

An Intercultural Committees in both Mindanao and Northern Areas had been set up to take care of the intercultural matters through Monday night gatherings, cultural celebrations and others but has to be revisited due to some committee members being gone from the region . The region needs to work more into strengthening our region-wide Inter-cultural Committee, which is an essential structure to alleviate and strengthen the interculturality of the region and its commitment to it. We will put more effort to have discussions and inputs on Interculturality in our area meetings and in embracing it as our Columban way of life. The points and insights on interculturality that surfaced during our last year regional assembly will be revisited.

CLM

The CLM continues to be very involved in the life and ministries of the Region and in close partnership with the ordained Columbans and the students. Currently there are 2 CLMs in Mindanao and 2 are in Manila Area. Lani and Ana in Mindanao are both in the various programs among the urban poor, the marginalized people and women in Barra Parish. John and Arlenne are in Manila Area and involved in different areas. John Din as the Regional JPIC coordinator has been very engaged in the ministry and has been expanding the ministry's collaboration and network with several organizations that address issues related to justice, peace and environmental integrity. Arlenne is back after her sabbatical program and renewed her term with the CLM for 3 years and she continues to hold key roles in the region as finance officer, works in the communications and for the regional website . With the quite active and regular social service ministry of SunHee in the region, and being the CLM contact person in the region, her new assignment has left a vacuum.

The partnership established in the region between the Columban LMs and the ordained has been quite significant and fruitful. The diverse expertise and hands-on abilities that

LMs bring contribute to a more holistic and impactful approach to mission. The situation of having no new Lay Missionaries in the next few years, the mission may struggle to address the multifaceted needs of communities considering the expertise, skills, insights and dedication they can offer for God's mission.

The Philippine Region had been an LM receiving and sending region that needs to be assisted with personnel in order to continue recruiting and providing orientation program. With the shortage of Lay Missionaries and the by not having a coordinator in the region, a different structure has to be created and developed considering that people joining CLM in the immediate future is shortfall.

In the previous regional assembly that addressed the issue of the region of not having a CLM coordinator and CLM orientation program, we have been asked to explore creative ways of being able to run an orientation program in our region, with such few CLM personnel, and given the fact that a few people here are showing interest in becoming LMs. A discussion of a structure to address such CLM situation has to be done earnestly in the upcoming CLM International Meeting.

JPIC

Our Columban Mission in this region continues to express its commitment to the poor and the exploited earth through our on-going ministries and programs. As a region we make serious effort to integrate our charism of JPIC-IRD in our programs and ministries like in our parishes in Mindanao and Manila and in our formation programs.

Faithful to the call of Laudatu Si, the Laudatu Si Movement Pilipinas continue to spearhead the celebration of Laudatu Si Week and the Season of Creation in the Philippines in collaboration with other groups. At the national level, through our leadership in the Laudatu Si Movement, we engage with our partners in responding to different ecological advocacies . We participate in different pro-life activities and mobilizations amplifying the understanding of pro-life to include all forms of life. The Laudatu Si Movement continues raise awareness of the current climate emergency.

Together with our partner NGO's we conducted strategic planning to explore the future of Negros Nine Foundation and its existing programs of organic farming , association of weavers and the rainforestation program.

The JPIC animator in Mindanao is working closely together in our continuing partnership with the Higaonon Indigenous Clan in the reforestation or tree-growing project in their ancestral lands. The expansion of the reforestation project is going through.

JPIC is a ministry that needs to collaborate with other NGOs to amplify its impact and to enhance the ability to reach a broader partners and work towards a common goal.

IRD

As the Columbans in Cagayan de Oro significantly involved as prime mover of the Interfaith Forum, our IRD Coordinator is now picking up with our previous Columban initiatives in Muslim-Christian Relations in Mindanao and revived the IRD group. Exposure program was set up to bring our FMA students to places and areas where Columbans engaged in Dialogue of life and Faith with the Muslims and learn about stories of Columbans who worked there. The students in Formation is also engaging in IRD in their pastoral assignments. This ministry should have a collaborative character and grassroot hold particularly in Mindanao but the interest in the local church is not strong.

MISSION PROMOTION & FUNDRAISING

Mission Appeals in parishes and schools have been going on. Mission Partners' Recollection and visitation have been done in a regular basis. For fundraising , mite box approach to schools and establishments has been sustainable. Revisiting former Columban parishes reviving connection and establishing new contacts persons for mission promotion and fundraising is underway particularly in Negros area. Lily Faunillan, a former lay missionary in Fiji, after a year of initial work as part of the Mission Promotion Team in Visayas Area is now working full time.

FORMATION

Currently there are 10 students in the Columban House of Studies 2 from Myanmar, 2 from Korea, 4 from Philippines, 1 from Fiji and 1 from Kiribati. Last year, there were 2 First/ Temporary aggregations and installation to the ministries of Lector and Acolyte. An ordination to the Diaconate of 2 post-FMA students who are now back to their own home regions and on their way to ordination to missionary priesthood. Just at the beginning of this year 2024, 4 students had their First Aggregation and around 5 students are set to begin their FMA program in August this year. The FMA programs in Mindanao and Peru are about to finish this May and 5 students will come back to do their post FMA studies in Manila this year. In this mid-July, Cireneo Matulac will be finishing up his extended term as seminary vice-rector and Ji KwangGyu will be taking over the vice-rectorship.

PARISHES

Barra Parish (Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro)

Last June 25, 2023 Barra had celebrated the First Anniversary as a parish. The parish has grown into what Bishop Cabantan in Cagayan De Oro has made clear that Barra is to be a "Pilot Missionary Parish". It also continues to be a parish-based venue for the Columban Society's priority ministry on JPIC-IRD. The parish-based programs and ministries are being strengthened and faithful in promoting dialogue between the Catholic parishioners and the large Meranao population residing there, responding to service for the poor and marginalized and the care for the Common Home. This first year of Barra Parish is a celebration of commitment, of partnership and collaboration for Columban Mission. Teakare Betero has completed his Visayan Language studies and now back to Barra Parish Ministry with Enrique.

Barra Parish has also been hosting our FMA Program availing and facilitating pastoral placements, cross-cultural mission experience through the parish ministries and programs.

The parish has been up into establishing their land area and now is in need to raise funds to pay for the land of the church.

Liloan Parish & Don Vic Parish (Archdiocese of Ozamis)

These two parishes will continue as Columban parishes for as long as Sean Martin and Brendan Kelly continue their commitment to them. These parishes have been active in fruit trees and native tree-growing activity which is a way to put into some actions the message of Laudatu Si.

Malate Parish (Archdiocese of Manila)

Malate Church is now in full swing after the easing of Covid-19 restrictions all over the country. The regular daily and Sunday masses, weddings, social services and other parish activities and celebrations have been back and doing well. Currently there are two ordained Columbans that leads the parish in a team. A Lay Missionary has just finished up her ministry in the social services of the parish. The volunteers of the parish are all out in their dedicated service. The outside-the-parish Columbans, the Vincentians and Diocesan priests in the Vicariate where Malate parish belongs have been open to extend a regular support for the weekend masses of the parish. The parish has been a good venue and cooperator for the Columban ministries, such as, JPIC, Mission Promotion & Fundraising, SIM and pastoral placements for Columban students.

The Parish Community is very appreciative for all that the Columbans have done in the community. The ministry in Malate Parish is seen as an important base for evolving and growing Columban Mission and for training/budding Columban Missionaries and in drawing people in as partners in mission. It is seen as a good support to the pastoral work of the newly ordained and seminarians. The parish has been a venue for JPIC

ministry in its advocacy for Ecology and as catalyst of the Laudato Si Movement and the care for the poor in the parish community. The parish has just launched a ministry for the hearing impaired of the parish and nearby parishes where they are incorporated during a Sunday morning mass. To ensure the continuity of the parish Deaf ministry, 8 parish volunteers were trained for sign language and now taking care of the ministry.

Parish finances has seen improvements as it comes out towards post-pandemic and mass goers are back to the church. After the halt of giving contribution to the region due to the pandemic, Malate parish has given back percentage of its income as annual donation to the region. Besides, our Columban Mission Promotion Team has conducted multiple Mission Appeals to the parish within a year and collected significant amount of donations, support and pledges everytime.

The Columban continues its presence in Malate coming up with a concrete plan for continuing our presence in the parish for a realistic period of time. The dialogue with the Archdiocese of Manila, the parishioners of Malate and the Columbans on the realistic 'when' for the Columbans to exit continues.

PROPERTIES

The work to have the property titles, namely - Singalong Central House, CLM House and the House of Studies transferred from the name of the Archdiocese of Manila to the Columban Missionary Society is still an ongoing toil and has to be pushed and accelerated in its following-up the process. The process of renewal of the registration of the Columban Missionary Society to the Social Exchange Commission (SEC) and the change of name from the previous regional director to the current one are done. We still have the Formilleza Law Firm helping us on this. A recent meeting with the Archbishop of Manila to discuss and follow-up the process on the properties gives a new movement to the transfer. The cost in fines to rectify this is passed on to this year's budget.

SINGALONG HOUSE

When the Covid crisis had reduced significantly the staff accomodation in Singalong house that was offered to ensure the safety of everyone, has ended. The house staff were quite appreciative of the protective and caring gestures by the Columbans to let them stay in Singalong during the Covid crisis.

Needless to say, our Singalong house has been underoccupied and underused. Currently, there are 3 priests, 2 LMs and 1 paying occupant who does masteral studies in the area of Interreligious Dialogue at LaSalle University, who are currently residing here full time. The Singalong House is being used now by the mission partners and the Malate Parish for recollection venue with catering arrangements with the Singalong house. While the Regional Offices of House Manager, Finance, Mission Promotion and Fundraising, Vocations, Archives, Communications, JPIC, Secretary to the Regional Director and Regional IT are still situated here in Singalong, it had been addressed in the previous regional council that we will open this for an accomodation for priests and church personnel doing studies in Manila. And once the transfer of Singalong property happens then decisions can be made about the future of the house.

PATAG HOUSE

The Columban house in Patag, Cagayan de Oro is well used by our priests, LMs and FMA students and for our Mindanao offices for Mission Promotion & Fundraising, Vocations and JPIC. Recently the IRD has established "Payag Kalinaw" or a Peace Cottage / Hut where meetings on Interreligious Dialogue take place on a regularly basis now.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Regional Assembly took place from September 18 to 20, 2023. The outside facilitator accompanied and assisted the assembly to journey the process of the Theory U – listening to the Holy Spirit's direction with regards to the decision to be made on the society's future. The assembly revolved around the theme of 'Letting Go is Letting Come'. We reflected on what are limiting us. As we let go of our limiting stories, we open ourselves to new possibilities. The assembly was encouraged to look at things with different set of lens , to be more open to the Spirit flow and it was also emphasized

that our way of only looking at 'what works' is secondary to 'what matters, what is meaningful and of value'. We were also encouraged to look at the image of Synodality – of us walking / journeying together in communion and in mission. And as we journey, we are reminded of the levels of listening. It is in deep listening that we get in touch how God convoke and gather us through the Holy Spirit.

Generally, the assembly was insightful, thought provoking, encouraging and a beautiful challenge. It was giving room to the Spirit.

VISITATION FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL

We are grateful and pleased that Brian Vale and Alvaro Martinez were able to do their visitations of almost all of the members, LMs, students, co-workers and met many of our partners in their visits to our ministries and programs . They were also able to pay the Columban Sisters a visit which was cherished. A few of the visitations were done online but most of it were face-to-face to the mutual delight and appreciation of both in meeting each other. The visitations went quite smoothly with the restrictions due to pandemic eased up. The presence of Brian and Alvaro during the Regional Assembly was truly appreciated.

Submitted by:

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