

Korean Region Annual Report - November 2023

The Great Learning, one of the books on Confucius' moral wisdom, has the following teaching:

Cultivate oneself. Bring order to the family. Govern the country. Bring peace to all.

I can say that the above quote from Confucius was an ideal for me during my leadership experience over the past two years.

Appointed directly from the CMU as director in Korea, I tried without prejudice to objectively respect the missionary history of the Korean Region, and after observation and reflection I decided to respond to the demands of the change of era as follows.

The first priority was to have a plan of action for the Korean Region. The second priority was the reorganization of the administrative structures and the third priority was to keep a balance between autonomy in the individual's apostolate and his or her participation in Regional priorities.

Firstly, the priority of the Korean Region is nurturing our benefactors and the development of Vocations. I divide the 90-year missionary history of the Korean Region into three generations. From the pioneers who first set foot in Korea in 1933 until the 1970s, our role was to establish and grow the Local Church. And from the 1980s to the 2000s, we devoted a lot to the scene of special ministries that the Local Church and society could not take care of. And from the 2000s to 2020, it's a time of transition in mission. The experience of the pandemic made our awareness of that reality very clear. In this change of era, we feel the need for continued interest in the benefactors who have always accompanied us in our mission over the past 90 years to fulfill our mission as Columbans. This continuous interest is not just an appreciation for them, but also includes the pastoral care of their religious and spiritual lives.

And while we cannot deny the global decline in Vocations, we do not give up our hope for vocations in Korea. Starting in the 1990s, Korean society began to gradually change into becoming a multicultural society. While first-generation immigrants have experienced prejudices in society, the second generation is incorporating naturally into Korean society which is becoming intercultural. Sharing our Columban Vision of 'Intercultural Living' we see potential for benefactors and vocations from among this new generation of Koreans.

Secondly, I would like to talk about the reorganization of the administrative structures. Currently, there are 26 missionaries (4 lay missionaries, 22 members) in the Korean Region.

Of course, while there are active missionaries in their 70s or older, missionaries under 60 are 14. In view of this reality, I have come to the conclusion that the administrative structures, which were set up for more than 50 or 100 missionaries over the past few decades, cannot be maintained today.

And so employees are being invited to take more responsibility in the mission work. Of course, there always has been participation of employees in the form of indirect mission, But in Korea due to the influence of clericalism, developing a culture whereby employees took more and more responsibility was difficult. Therefore, through the reorganization of the administrative structures centered on employees, we intend to create an environment whereby the employees will have primary responsibility in their specific areas of work while the final responsibility will lie with the regional director.

Thirdly, I would like to talk about the balance between ensuring the autonomy of individual missionaries in their apostolates while also inviting them to participate in the priority activities of the region. The initial role of Columban mission in the Local Church was very clear to help the Local Church grow. As the Local Churches grew, the Columban Mission, embracing the signs of the times, played a pioneering role in establishing special ministries taking care of the underprivileged that the Local Church and society could not take care of. In this pioneering role, the leadership's role was to invite missionaries and support their activities by establishing places for missionaries to work in accordance with the times.

But even though we all recognize that we cannot stay in the past at this time of transition in Columban mission, not everyone seemed to be proactive in facing the challenges and changes in the way forward. At the beginning of my term as a leader, I complained a lot about this lukewarm attitude of fellow missionaries. But realizing that, before I took on the role of regional director, I was also immersed in the perception that my own missionary work was the most important thing, I was able to understand the position of my fellow missionaries who showed a lukewarm attitude toward new challenges and changes in Mission in the Region.

Therefore, leadership tries to balance the individual's preference for a particular mission apostolate along with a sense of belonging to a Region, having an involvement in the Regional Priority Missionary directions. It does this by inviting fellow missionaries to participate in regional activities while ensuring the autonomy of their own missionary activities which they are already doing. Through this balance, we will be able to continue to play a pioneering role in the Local Church and the Universal Church by responding as Columbans to

the demands of the change of era.

The above report may seem like a narrow, limited view of the Korean Region, but I believe it also reflects the reality of the wider Society on the ground. This gap between the perspective of individual missionary and RMU leadership, as seen in the Korean Region, is also reflected in the gap between the perspective of the General Council and the concerns of the individual RMUs. From the beginning, these reflections and concerns made me more aligned with the concerns of the leadership of the wider Columban Society. Therefore, I actively try to participate in the invitation of the central leadership, which is constantly striving to close this gap.

Through this participation, I also support and invite the missionaries of the Korean Region to take a role and participate at the regional level to the extent that it does not infringe on their individual ministries. I think it is important not to lose the balance between the regional priorities and the individual ministry. At the same time, I think it is the role of leadership not just to stop with one invitation, but to constantly offer things that missionaries are interested in and can happily and joyfully celebrate in. Finally, even though the leader is also a weak and fragile person, I think it is important not to yield to self doubt and give up on inviting fellow missionaries!

Seo Kyunghi Stephen Nov 2023.