



CLMCLT REPORT

2024 CLM International Meeting
Manila, Philippines

CLM is like a body of water, it is like a stream near a spring of water (the Spirit) connected to surrounding small streams (RMUs). CLT's stream is bubbling up and energises the larger stream of CLM and the Society's General Council's stream. These springs are involved in reaching out to accompany, communicate, dialogue, share recommendations and decisions as well energising CLM through a variety of engagements such as sharing of mission stories and reflections (Laycom) and the regular online sessions. This CLT stream is generous and keeps the water flowing by listening, reflecting and responding as well as guiding and making decisions.

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Since water never stops flowing, the members of CLT are committed to witnessing and listening to the flow of the water. We are in the flow, but we also step out to observe our own flow and the flow of CLM. We delight in being part of the flow of the stream.

For the past year, CLM has been walking together a path of a synodality through a period of discernment and inner work of transformation processes that will prepare the CLT, LMs and some ordained members of the LMLT for the CLM International Meeting. This upcoming meeting will provide the participants the venue to continue to reflect, discuss and make courageous decisions for the emerging future of CLM in light of what is going on in our world and the impact of the pandemic and environmental/climate change to our lives and to CLM.

Mission

Lay missionaries (LMs) have a long history of engagement with the Columban mission priorities of JPIC and IRD. In Britain, Ireland, Taiwan, Korea, USA/Mexico, Myanmar and Pakistan, LMs are engaged in various ways with the challenges associated with international and internal migration, refugees, human trafficking and asylum seekers. Some LMs and former LMs who hold the Columban Coordinator/Contact Person roles in JPIC have a particular commitment to ecology such as in the Philippines, Korea, and Britain. Other ministries LMs are involved in are the ministry to the youth, to homeless, parish catechesis, special education, women and children, and the indigenous ministry. Two specialized ministries that LMs have initiated are outreach to the hearing-impaired individuals in

Barra Parish, Cagayan de Oro (PH) and HIV/AIDS education and advocacy in Hsinchu Diocese, Taiwan. Most LMs have a professional background, so we see the value of integrating their professions into their ministries as well as ongoing learning in the service of our JPIC and IRD ministries. However, we have very little success in encouraging and facilitating our LMs to be engaged regularly in IRD.

The majority of LMs are women and over the years some of our female LMs have taken leadership roles in their ministries, RMUs and in the CLT. We have witnessed a woman LM as a member of the formation committee. *The Spirit is re-imagining and renewing the Church, in particular through the inclusion and empowerment of the laity, especially women, as well as in the acknowledgment of LGBT+ as beloved sons and daughters of God* (Transitioning for Columban Mission, Introduction). We acknowledge that it is necessary to create broader opportunities for a more inclusive female presence in the Church. We emphasize and acknowledge the feminine lay presence in CLM and in the wider Society. We continue to promote the integration of women in decision making positions, especially when important decisions need to be made.

Our CLM Newsletter, LAYCOM, continues to be an important source of mission stories and reflections that promotes mission awareness, vocation promotion and fundraising efforts. Many of these stories are published by Columban magazines and websites. In today's digital age, where everyone is armed with a smartphone camera, the power of visual communication has never been more prominent. CLT and GC offered a workshop on photography and videography to develop our confidence and skills in creating quality digital content. CLT is planning to integrate digital materials into Laycom.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Across the CLM and the Society, we have LMs taking on various leadership roles. These range from CLM Coordinators/Contact Persons, JPIC Coordinators/Contact Persons, LMLT members, MU Coordinator, MU Bursar, Finance Officer, etc. Currently, out of 25 LMs, 19 LMs are in leadership roles throughout the Society. The CLT Coordinator is the delegate to the General Council and participates in regular GC meetings and joins GC members in social and discussion groups. In response to these ongoing developments, LMs proposed during the 2020 CLM International Meeting to initiate a new composition of the CLT: 2 LMs and 1 ordained member from the General Council. This was approved and began with the current CLT team. These new developments deepen our partnership and collaboration as well as the way we engage, support, and challenge each other. The recent RMU visitations were conducted by the GC and CLT together. CLT and GC continue to explore ways to deepen partnership at the central level.

LMs continue to foster partnership and collaboration among themselves, with the ordained, students and co-workers as manifested in Columban life and ministries across various RMUs. More than 30 years ago, the Society emphasized that *'partnership is our way of being on mission'*. However, as the number of Columbans declines and our younger generation, both ordained and LMs, become more culturally diverse as well as coming mostly from more hierarchal cultures, we find it challenging to live out this partnership. Another development is the increase of co-workers holding greater responsibilities in Columban mission, so now we need to envision partnership as a three-way process, involving co-workers, lay missionaries and ordained.

The pandemic had been a major challenge for the previous CLT and during the first year and a half of the present CLT regarding carrying out its responsibility to do RMU visitation and putting into practice

the CLT Plan of Action. However, it also resulted in us using the internet more to stay connected and carry out our responsibilities. The regular CLM Zoom gatherings have become the new platform to bring together all the LMs and LMLT members across the different RMUs, to share our stories and struggles, and learn from each other. Moreover, it allows our communication to be more engaging and interactive. Zoom has also become a forum for workshops and webinars, enabling LMs to gain fresh insights and learn new skills. Online gatherings brought us together and helped us become more connected with each other. The 2020 CLM Review, International Meeting, CLT Elections, some of the GC/CLT visitations, CLM Discernment and 1st phase of the CLM International Meeting, and the “Prayerful and Courageous Conversations”, were conducted virtually.

We continue to reflect on and discuss the lasting impact that the pandemic and environmental/climate change will have on people’s way of life and what a “new normal” might look like as well as how this will shape CLM during the coming years. With the uncertainties surrounding us and the ongoing effects of the pandemic, wars and conflicts on our lay missionaries, the digital platform will continue to be a vital tool. CLT intend to continue to maximize this tool to promote greater connection, build collaboration, and provide various educational opportunities.

Just as water erodes even the strongest of rocks, persistence and hard work can overcome any obstacle.

There is some debris in the stream which CLT must flow around. There are logs and obstacles stacked up at the moment, so CLT need to trust the flow of the stream (Spirit) and keep moving forward at the right pace.

We have witnessed a lot of LMs leaving CLM for one reason or another during these past years which has put added pressure on some RMUs as they now struggle with smaller numbers. Accepting the current reality of diminishing numbers is one log jam which some parts of the CLM stream are stuck up against.

Over the years, especially during the pandemic, the recent situation of increasing numbers of migrants and refugees and wars and conflicts has meant getting visas for some countries has become very difficult. This reality has put a strain on assigning/appointing a LM Coordinator in sending RMUs (Korea, Oceania-Fiji and Philippines). Traditionally, the LM Coordinators have been people originating in these RMUs. While it is ideal for the LM Coordinator to understand the culture and speak the local language, since we are cross-cultural missionaries, having a LM from another nationality as LM Coordinator can be a witness to our charism. CLT encourages and promotes the value of forming “team leaders” in these sending RMUs.

There are other obstacles such as resistance to involvement in Society mission priorities, deeper reflection on the current mission model, and caution in speaking out about a lack of partnership and support in some RMUs. CLT need to promote the flow of the Spirit to encourage them to keep trusting. Honest dialogues are needed to speak up about the current situation. To invite other LMs to be more generous and honest in their sharing and engagement is hopefully part of the future flow.

VOCATION AND ORIENTATION PROGRAM

In 2019 the first Joint Sending Orientation Program (JSOP) was conducted in Oceania-Fiji with candidates from Fiji, Tonga and New Zealand. A member from the CLT went to Fiji to support the LM Coordinator in facilitating the running of the JSOP.

Over the past 4 years, unfortunately, there has not been an LM sending orientation program. The pandemic has deeply impacted the mental health of many young adults. In the countries where most LMs come from, young people are feeling a great responsibility to help their families to find a way out of economic difficulties. Their confidence in themselves and in their ability to shape their future has been dented. Many of them have had their education programs seriously interrupted by the pandemic. Korea and Oceania have some possible candidates in the Come and See programs, however, it is still quite challenging for these participants to commit and to form a team for the orientation program.

Another factor to consider, which is beyond our control, is that of visas. Obtaining a religious worker visa for several countries, such as Ireland, Britain, Pakistan, Taiwan and Myanmar, has become more complicated due to strict requirements, various limitations, as well as frequent changes in immigration policies.

LIFELONG COMMITMENT

The Lifelong Commitment proposal had been a tedious and challenging undertaking as it not only requires a long process and numerous discussions, but it also invokes a variety of emotions. We are grateful for the LMs and ordained participation and contributions to the discernment and discussion on the 2 models. Sad to learn that not many LMs gave their feedback and that leaves us still holding many questions.

The depth of water holds infinite possibilities, such as joining up with other fresh springs like greater partnership and collaboration among LMs, ordained, students, priest associates, co-workers in RMUs



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and possibly with other mission groups. Sharing of CLM experience will lead to a stronger flow in the stream. We are called to listen to the bubbling streams. Venturing into the depth is no easy task. The extreme depths and pressures present numerous obstacles for exploration. The crushing force of the water at such depths poses a threat to our vision. However, as we flow together, we not only expand our spirit of community and mission commitment but also gain

insights that may shape the CLM future. The depth remains a testament to the boundless wonders of possibilities, reminding us to continue our quest for discovery and understanding that requires imagination, creativity and a generosity of spirit.