

UK Lay Xaverian Reality.

Background.

As outlined in the recent COSUMA Europa meeting the situation in the UK is quite different from that of Italy or Spain. Over the years we have tried in many ways to formulate a lay Xaverian model here in the UK but due to many various factors it has never really taken off. Part of the problem has been a different context in which the Catholic Church in the UK finds itself. In both England and Scotland, the Catholic Church is a minority and very parochial. Therefore, any lay attachment to the Church usually comes through the parishes or lay movements attached to the Parishes (Saint Vincent De Paul, Legion of Mary, Knights of St Columba, etc). There have been some orders who have been successful in having lay membership but the majority of these are contemplative orders (Carmelites, Benedictines, etc) or established active orders like the Jesuits, who have a very successful volunteer programme (Jesuit Volunteer Services.) The other reality is that any person attracted to a mission experience can also find Catholic organisations tailor made for this purpose (Volunteer Missionary Movement -with whom we are connected) and other secular organisations (Voluntary Services Overseas, Peace Corps, Oxfam, etc)

Our reality.

Since the arrival of the Xaverian to the UK over 70 years ago, the Xaverians have relied on the generosity of benefactors and **friends**. Our present structures, our native vocations, our financial ability to do our work...has been down to the relationships built and the generosity and kindness of these friends. Every Xaverian and every community has cultivated these groups of friends, who understand the Universal Mission of the Church and our role in it and have been keen to help in whatever way possible. These good people support and sustain us daily and we have been blessed over the years and continue to be graced with their love for and support of the Xaverian Family.

Another category of lay involvement is that group of people who collaborate with us in specific projects or activities. These **collaborators** volunteer their time, they offer financial support, and encourage support through various fundraising initiatives. They also volunteer their services, network with us and others, give of their talents/resources and organise events. Many of these people have the global optic and are often motivated by the plight of those less fortunate associated with our missions overseas.

Over the years, a third group is made up of those whom we would call **lay associates**. These have tried to form a Lay Xaverian Movement in the UK, but it has been a bit "hit and miss", where it has started and then died away. Perhaps part of the reason is not having a Xaverian prepared and committed to focus solely on this important activity and, also, due to the various other demands that our lay people face daily. These associates tend to be more attached to individual communities, yet over the years we have cultivated a good group in both Preston and Coatbridge who, together, have collaborated very successfully. These groups tend to embrace more the Xaverian Spirituality and Xaverian Charism, and so, as well as being involved in activities, they take part, organise and promote, moments of prayer, retreat days,

pilgrimages, weekends away, talks in the Parishes, etc., to deepen their missionary calling as lay people associated with a Missionary order. Some of them have visited our overseas missions for short stays, but they are more drawn to promoting and supporting the mission and activities of the Xaverian Community here in the UK.

Recently we have been more drawn into networking and **partnerships** with established lay groups who in many ways are “likeminded” in their vision, spirituality and charism...groups that are akin to us. Such groups have asked us to be advisors or chaplains given our connections with them. These include, Pax Christi, the Poverty Alliance, Inter faith Forums, Scottish Laity Network, A Call to Action (ACTA), Young Christin Workers (YCW), UK Citizens... and others. Being a small Xaverian Region, we have seen that this has been a useful way forward in encouraging and supporting the missionary vocation of the laity.

Jim Clarke, s.x.

UK Xaverian Region.