

Dear friends of Mariannahill PNG!

This edition of TANGET should reach you before you blow out the Christmas candles. I wish you, also in name of the other CMM confreres in PNG, a Blessed and Joyful Christmas!

For us, CMM in PNG, Christmas reminds us always of **Bishop Henry van Lieshout**, the first Bishop of Lae Diocese, because he died on the eve of Christmas, sitting in his easy chair, preparing the liturgy of the Nightmass which he was going to celebrate with the community of the St. Martin's Parish. His heart gave up and **Fr. Ignatius Bwalya**, at that time also a member of our community at Mariannahill House and coming back from the Night Vigil, found him sitting in his chair, like in a deep sleep. Too deep indeed to wake up again!

That was in 2009, ten years ago. **Bishop Rozario Menezes** thought it fitting to have a special memorial service, and so on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December we had a Eucharistic Celebration, presided by Bishop Rozario in the church of the Pastoral Centre at St. Joseph's, 8 Mile, next to the cemetery where Bishop Henry's body found its last resting place.

Some 250 people turned up. St. Stephen's Parish had organized the singing. Next to the altar was a wooden frame with objects from Bishop Henry's life.

I was asked by Bishop Rozario to give the sermon, and so I sketched Bishop Henry's curriculum, and tried to describe his main character traits, making use of Fr. Anthony Mulderink's memories of Bishop Henry's personality. Mentioning Bishop Henry's humility, his sense of humour, his nearness to the people and his joyfulness, I saw many heads nodding in approval. The people still remember well their beloved Bishop.

It was nice to have the crib already installed in the church. Christmas gives exactly the family atmosphere of humble humanity proper of late Bishop Henry. It was also this atmosphere that surrounded his going to the Father's House.

After Mass we went a moment to the cemetery, where **Fr. Roland Masima Matoyi**, our Regional Superior, led a short prayer and the blessing of the grave.

Then refreshment and some snacks were offered at the Pastoral Centre.

In January we shall have another special celebration, remembering at its first anniversary the sudden death of **Bishop Christian Blouin, cmm**.

That will be already 2020. The twenty first century is nearly coming of age, and kids are thinking that smart phones have always been there, while the older ones among us are still struggling to find their way in the dense media traffic.

Talking about the media, our much praised **Catholic Radio of Lae Diocese** is silent since the 10<sup>th</sup> of December due to a technical failure. The STL receiver at the tower is not working. Repair is expected to take place in January. In the meantime you have to content yourself with the BBC or the ABC.

Our confrere **Deacon Daniel Apas** is having this year a special Christmas, more identified with Christ's suffering than with his birth. Ten days ago he suffered a backlash in his health

and is since then in the hospital. Not only we, his confreres, but also his family is near to him.

Especially his nephews, who must love uncle Daniel very much, are nearer to him than the shepherds to the crib and accompany him literally day and night. We wish deacon Daniel a speedy recovery.

On Thursday, 12 December, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of **Sister Pauline Mpongo, CPS.**

Also the three new priests from India who have already come to Lae to join our diocese, were invited.

Bishop Rozario, aware of the shortage of priests in the diocese, has dedicated already quite some time and energy in contacting Congregations that could provide more personnel. In January another Congregation, specialized in Education, is due to provide three Brothers, who will take care of the Catholic Schools in Lae Diocese. They are very welcome, as at present and according to news commentaries, the level of school education in the country is going down.

This Christmas there are only two CPS Sisters in Lae as **Sister Pascal Nyadmadzawo** went on home-leave and **Sister Michaela Kim** had to go home to Korea due to her mother's delicate health.

In the light of the latest Apostolic Letter of **Pope Francis**, entitled "Admirabile Signum", which talks about the importance of the Nativity Scene, Bishop Rozario has announced what seems to be a "first" in Lae Diocese, namely a crib-competition. Today, the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, he went with a jury and accompanied by many more faithful, from parish to parish to see the cribs prepared and evaluate them so that a winner can be proclaimed. Some parishes have done a great job and made cribs even too big to have a place within the parish church, like the one at St. Stephen's parish, made with live-size figures. No surprise that pigs, our national house-animal by excellence, take the place of ox and donkey, although not necessarily in the sense of Isaiah, 1.2-3.

The initiative, centering the attention of the faithful on the event of the Nativity, is much needed here, as Christmas entered PNG when Santa Klaus was already conquering the market, by now occupying every corner of house and home, and leaving no space for the little Jesus.

By the way, famous became this year the crib called "Let mum rest" thanks to the commentaries of Pope Francis. He stressed that this crib shows in a beautiful way the tenderness and solidarity so much needed in family life today.

As to **national news** the most important event of the last months was the referendum in Bougainville.

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville held a referendum, in compliance with and as part of the Peace Agreement between Bougainville and the Government of PNG of 2001: The people of Bougainville had to choose between independence and greater autonomy.

On 12 December the newspaper published the results: nearly **98%** of the valid votes were in favor of independence.

The Peace Agreement, however, rules that the referendum is not binding. The final decision will be taken by the Parliament of PNG.

That means: We have a wide-open door for a possible conflict between the official arrangement and the feelings of nearly the whole of Bougainville – long live independence! With that we have – parallel to the European Brexit – our own Bouxit, with probably as many years of uncertainty.

Dear friends, I wish you all, in name of all confreres here in PNG, a beautiful Christmas-time and a good start of the new year 2020!

With the Diocese of Lae receiving new missionaries and working out a new Pastoral Plan, we – Missionaries of Mariannahill – expect some changes to affect us. We may have some news on that already in the next edition of the TANGET.

May the good Lord bless us all in the New Year with peace within and without and the typical Christian joy, so deeply rooted in Christmas!