

Pater Alfonso Voorn CMM aus Papua Neuguinea - März 2018

Dear friends of Mariannahill PNG!

Sorry for delaying a Tanget that should have reached you at least a month earlier. However, the delay offers me now the opportunity to wish you all, and in name of all the confreres and CPS Sisters here in PNG, a Blessed and Joyful Easter!

Why should I have sent you this Tanget so much earlier? Because of important events that took place already two months ago. Our most senior member and champion in years spent in PNG, **Fr. Anthony Mulderink**, after having served Christ and the Church in PNG for 57 years, left us for good on the 16th of January. After the farewell of **Fr. Sido van der Werf**, who left us in May last year, now all the pioneers are gone and a new era of Mariannahill presence in PNG is at our very doorsteps.

Fr. Anthony's PNG curriculum started in 1960, when he arrived with the fathers Gerard Hafmans, Bert Kempkes and Harry van Lieshout as the first Mariannahill missionaries in Lae, situated at the Huon Gulf, and capital of the Morobe Province. (Most of you may have read about their first experiences in the HALLO, edited by Fr. Frans Lenssen at the beginning of this year.)

The Morobe Province had been evangelized by Lutheran missionaries, but Lae, a growing harbour town, and Wau – Bulolo, where a gold rush was going on, attracted people from other provinces, looking for work, among them also Catholics. The Catholic Church in Lae and a few other places in the province was growing mainly due to this immigration. In 1960 there were about 1.750 Catholics in the Province. At that time the Passionist Fathers were taking care of the Catholics in Lae, but their Congregation ran short of personnel for the task.

In 1959 Rome found our Congregation ready to take up the challenge. The Dutch Province had a good number of young members eager to go out to the mission field.

Fr. Anthony's work as a priest and pastor has taken place mainly in Lae and on Mandok island, Siassi, bringing him in contact with the two basic social realities of modern PNG: on Mandok, where he was 12 years, with traditional life and its rich inheritance, and on the other hand the rapidly changing society, experienced in Lae and among the students of the Technical University in Lae, whose chaplain he was for 25 years. On Mandok he learned the local language and worked out a grammar and a dictionary of it. He collected hundreds of photos, copies, print-outs and illustrations of local art, waiting still to be systematized into what well could become one day an encyclopaedia of Mandok art.

Fr. Anthony has been living in Lae mainly at St. Joseph's Station, 8 Mile, the first station started by our confreres. He remained available for pastoral work up to his departure. Known for his patient and mild character, he was very much loved and appreciated.

The last two weeks of his stay here were marked by a continuous flow of people coming to St. Joseph to say goodbye. Several farewell celebrations took place, especially at Unitech and at St. Joseph's Station.

We, Mariannahill and CPS, had a goodbye celebration in the evening of Friday, the 5th of January. First we celebrated the Eucharist, in which Fr. Anthony presided. Fr. Alfonso and Bishop Chris enveloped the celebration with words of welcome and of thanks. Afterwards we had our traditional kaikai in the “haus win”.

I had made a song for him as a farewell present. I am so free to reproduce the text here:

Anthony is like the forest,  
Anthony is like the sea.  
He is part of our environment,  
Which surrounds us, you and me.

Anthony is like a palm tree  
Moving gently in the breeze,  
Greeting, smiling, waiving gently  
To all those he hears and sees.

Anthony is like a sea-gull;  
Siassi might have taught him so,  
always searching the horizon  
to discover and to know.

Anthony is a man of listening,  
A man of knowing many stories,  
Listening to him in turn  
Brings you peace, removes your worries.

Fifty-seven years of serving,  
Sometimes sure and sometimes guessing,  
But all time for Church and people,  
being a gentle, constant blessing.

Life, however, is a process.  
Years are coming and are going.  
We are pilgrims here on earth,  
Moving where the wind is blowing.

And the wind blowing through his body,  
Sensing frailty everywhere,  
Sends our Anthony to his homeland  
To receive the needed care.

While the body needs returning,  
The heart protests and asks in wonder  
If heart and body, when flying off,  
Will not be torn in pain asunder.

But even then, between heaven and earth,  
flying through the cloudless sky,

peace will still remain his treasure  
softening the question: why?

Thank you, Anthony, for your friendship,  
For your kindness and your peace,  
We will miss you and your wisdom,  
Now you are going overseas.

Being away you'll still be with us,  
Teaching patience, care and love,  
How to grow in age and wisdom,  
Asking God's gifts from above.

May the good Lord bless your future!  
Safe arrival and a good start!  
While you are living far away,  
You'll be always in our hearts.

News of a different character, but also already two months old, refers to another member of our CMM community here, **Bishop Christian Blouin**. After a night with pain in the heart region, **Bishop Chris** was brought, in the early morning of Sunday, the 7th of January, while the Church in PNG woke up to celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, to the Angau Memorial Hospital of Lae. A check-up was done in the ICU of the hospital and Bishop Chris was three days on the monitor, while our confreres and the CPS Sisters kept turns in being with him day and night. When he had gained some strength, Bishop Chris flew, for a more detailed observation and accompanied by Sister Henriquetta Muchate, CPS, to Port Moresby where he was for another week in the General Hospital. The diagnosis could not, however, be followed up by the necessary operation and Bishop Chris was flown to Manila where, in a specialized Heart Centre, he underwent a heart operation: three by-passes and repair of a heart valve, quite a bit more than anyone might have expected. Sister Henriquetta has been all the time his guardian angel, for which we are her and the CPS very grateful. Thanks to God, Bishop Chris is recovering well, but still in Manila for the necessary controls. We are also very grateful to the Missionaries of Jesus, who are working in Lae Diocese and have a house in Manila near the Heart Centre, for their mediation in the whole process. We hope that Bishop Chris will soon be able to travel and come to Lae to be again among us.

Our Mariannahill community in PNG has become over the years from extremely "wantok", being - at the beginning - all members from the Netherlands, to extremely pluri-cultural, at the moment nine members from seven different countries. Our challenges are quite different from those at the beginning. These challenges were presented to our Fr. General, **Fr. Thulani Mbuyisa**, and **Br. Hansel Jaison**, General Councillor, when they came to us on Canonical Visitation from the 17th of February till the 9th of March. The challenges we face as a community may require from us quite some effort and imagination, as those expressed in the title of Fr. Adalbert Balling's book on Fr. Bernard Huss: "Binde Deinen Karren an einen Stern" – "Moor your wagon to a star!" Will we be able to do something like that? After we receive the Visitation report, we'll see to it. Maybe even under a new Bishop, whose appointment we are still waiting for.

More news about the daily work of our confreres in the next edition of the Tanget. The CPS Sisters are waiting for more reinforcement, while **Sister Salome**, already here, is waiting patiently, engaged as far as possible, her registration as clinical officer. At the Centre of

Mercy they are sharing with the rest of the country a regular shortage of medicines. You may all have heard of the severe earthquake (7.5 on the Richter scale) that hit part of PNG on the 26th of February between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning. Together with many aftershocks and the resulting landslides it caused much destruction and many deaths. The country is in mourning. Around 150 people died, many of them just buried alive. Whole villages can't go back to the place where once they had their home, houses and gardens being buried under land- and mudslides. It was the heaviest earthquake in PNG since 1922. It hit mainly the highlands, Enga, Hela, Southern and Western Province. The Churches are mobilizing their help, the big mining companies, who are making huge profits in the region, show themselves generous and the Government is looking for the funds it once put aside for this kind of disaster. Money will rebuild houses, schools, clinics and churches, but not heal the wounds in so many hearts, missing their loved ones.

With all, a Blessed and Happy Easter to all of you! Let us bring life wherever death threatens!