

Pater Alfonso Voorn CMM aus Papua Neuguinea – Juli 2018

Dear friends of Mariannahill PNG!

Greetings from a rainy Lae! Heavy rains are the normal thing in Lae in this season of the year! We send you also buckets full of love and blessings!

After this pictorial meditation on technical progress and its consequences for human involvement in the solution of related problems, let me first give you some news about our own CMM members and the CPS Sisters here in Lae.

You may remember from the latest Tanget that in January **Bishop Christian Blouin** **underwent** a heart operation in Manila, Philippines. Well, after a successful operation he came back to PNG on the 10th of April, two and a half months later, with **Sister Henriqueta Muchate, CPS**, who had accompanied him to Manila, and was there at his side, representing, to say so, the whole diocese.

On the 11th Bishop Chris first paid a visit to the General Hospital and then he and Sister Henriqueta flew to Lae.

Since then, Bishop Chris has been steadily recovering from his heart operation and is now practically back to normal. Congratulations!

The Centre of Mercy is happy to have Sister Henriqueta back at her daily care of the sick, after three months of absence.

Fortunately, **Sister Salome Karara, CPS**, got finally registered as medical officer in PNG and is now fully engaged in the Centre of Mercy, which daily treats hundreds of patients.

On the 23rd of April we, CMM, came together in Mariannahill House, Eriku, to discuss the Visitation Letter we had received from Fr. General. Our main challenge is to strike a balance between community life and pastoral engagement. As you know already, we are an extremely pluricultural community: 9 members of 7 different nationalities, and soon, Deo volente, 10 members and 8 nationalities! Is that part of the globalization?

On the 24th of May, the anniversary of the death of **Abbot Francis**, we came together in Mariannahill House for common reflection and prayer. In the evening, together with the CPS Sisters, we celebrated the Eucharist and had an abundance of delicious pizza in the “haus win”.

A few days later, on the 28th of May **Fr. Krzysztof Zacharuk** took a well deserved home-leave after another three years in the Diocese of Lae, caring mainly for the 8 Catholic Siassi communities. One of our priests in the Diocese will have to take from time to time the boat to Siassi during Fr. Krzysztof's three months absence, so that those communities can celebrate the Eucharist.

And interesting news referring to **Fr. Sido van der Werf**, who is since last year back in the Netherlands but has been for 53 years in PNG. On the 11th of June, Queen Elizabeth's 92nd birthday, a new list of people to be awarded a Commonwealth conde-coration was published. Well, Fr. Sido is on the list of those to be made "Officer of the British Empire" because of his longstanding service to – as it is mentioned – "education and to the Catholic Church in Morobe Province". Congratulations, Sido! The British Empire should be happy to have also this kind of "conquerors"!

On the 1st of July **Fr. Brian Nonde** went on home-leave. He is the parish priest at St. Stephan's, 3 Mile, and in charge of the Catholic Radio in Lae.

Fr. Arnold Schmitt went on home-leave on the 3rd of July. As Fr. Arnold is the Vicar General of the Diocese and the appointment of the new Bishop is in the air, it was difficult for him to decide on an opportune date for going on home-leave, due this year. But as there are signs that the appointment is still going to take a few months, he was advised to go now.

We wish our confreres on home-leave a good rest from their intense pastoral activity here and a safe return to "Paradise".

That even PNG, home of the bird of Paradise, doesn't escape from the general condition of our dear mother earth of being "paradise lost", became again clear at a Church-Government workshop on **sorcery** which took place in Lae from 22 to 24 May. All Churches took part. **Bishop Chris** was also invited.

The workshop was a follow-up of a Church conference on sorcery held in Lae from 14th to 16th November 2016. The workshop addressed the still wide-spread belief in sorcery and witchcraft and especially the increase in sorcery accusation related violence, which normally brings about - now as in the past - the torturing and killing of the persons accused.

The Churches have worked out a strategic plan on sorcery beliefs and "sorcery accusation related violence" (SARV), but nobody expects a rapid change in sorcery related "events". As one Lutheran Bishop put it: "The most important step is to come up with an approach to change the mindset of our people, to change the way they see and interpret issues related to sickness and death. People continue to blame each other." (The National, May 29, 2018, p. 6)

As proof is difficult, suspicions are enough to launch an accusation; anyone can be accused and punishment is served instantly.

Therefore, there are two levels on which people should be educated towards change:

1. the level of awareness about the causes of sickness through education and information;
2. the level of how to deal with accusations, developing an evidence-based research framework and eradicating the traditional “instant justice”.

As was the case in Europe in times of witch-hunt, women are the ones who more frequently are accused of sorcery, tortured and killed. It thus becomes a part of gender based violence.

We need an sort of Enlightenment as Europe in the 17th century, but especially brave people who stand up against “spontaneous” accusations in their own environment.

On Tuesday, the 8th of May, we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the start of our Catholic Radio in Lae at the Diocesan Offices, where the Radio Station is housed and from where it operates.

Fr. Brian Nonde, who is in charge of the Radio, welcomed the guests, among them many who had supported with means and work the Radio. **Bishop Christian Blouin** highlighted the occasion, and **Harry Bulunasoi**, one of our ex-seminarians and now fully engaged at the Radio, showed in a powerpoint the short history of the Radio station. Then a brunch was offered.

The Catholic Radio plays an important part in the evangelization, and we are all happy that it is back to full operation.

Bishop Henry van Lieshout saw its importance, and he sourced funds, especially in his home parish in Venlo, Holland, to set up the Radio in Lae. From the 8th of May 2003 on, the radio became an instrument for sowing the Gospel values of peace, solidarity, reconciliation and safety in the Morobe Province, especially in Lae, plagued at that time by increasing criminality and ethnic clashes.

The Catholic Radio FM 103.7 became popular not only among Catholics, but also among a wider public. It became a radio for the people.

However, the growth was mainly external. There are many listeners, but few personnel is working at the Radio, and is doing so with equipment not renovated since 15 years. An update of equipment and an increase of personnel are urgent. A campaign to bring in new funds has been started generously by our Swiss CMM Province, but – needless to say - help is welcome from anywhere. Direct contact can be established via cathfm103.7@gmail.com.

Once every four years the federation of the Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania assembles. This year it did so in Port Moresby. All Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of the Catholic Church in Oceania came together for this meeting from the 11th till the 17th of April. Eighty-one participants took part in this assembly of whom 75 were bishops from Oceania. From Rome the Secretary of State of the Vatican, Cardinal Pietro Parolin had come.

The theme of the assembly was “**Care for our common home of Oceania – a sea of possibilities**”. Let us hope that many possibilities blossom and give abundant fruit!

And, last but not least, a very local news item, just at the doorsteps of St. Joseph’s Station:

The normal running of St. Joseph Catholic Technical School, set up by our CMM Brothers in the sixties at 8 Mile, Lae, suffered a major setback, when on the 19th of April suddenly the pressure was off the water taps. The cause turned out to be a burnt-out electrical pump. The immediate search for a new one revealed that all companies were out of stock. The new pump had to come from Australia. Most of the 300 plus students were sent home. Two and a half weeks later they came back and classes continued.

Rainy Lae, indeed! But for running an institution like St. Joseph’s Technical School, rainwater turns out not to be enough. Let us say YES to technical progress, including asphalt, pumps and, of course, a good Radio Station!

From all of us:

God bless, and till next time