

CROSSINGS IN MERCY



The Story of the Sisters of Mercy
Papua New Guinea 1956 – 2006

Teresa A Flaherty RSM

ABOUT THE SISTERS OF MERCY

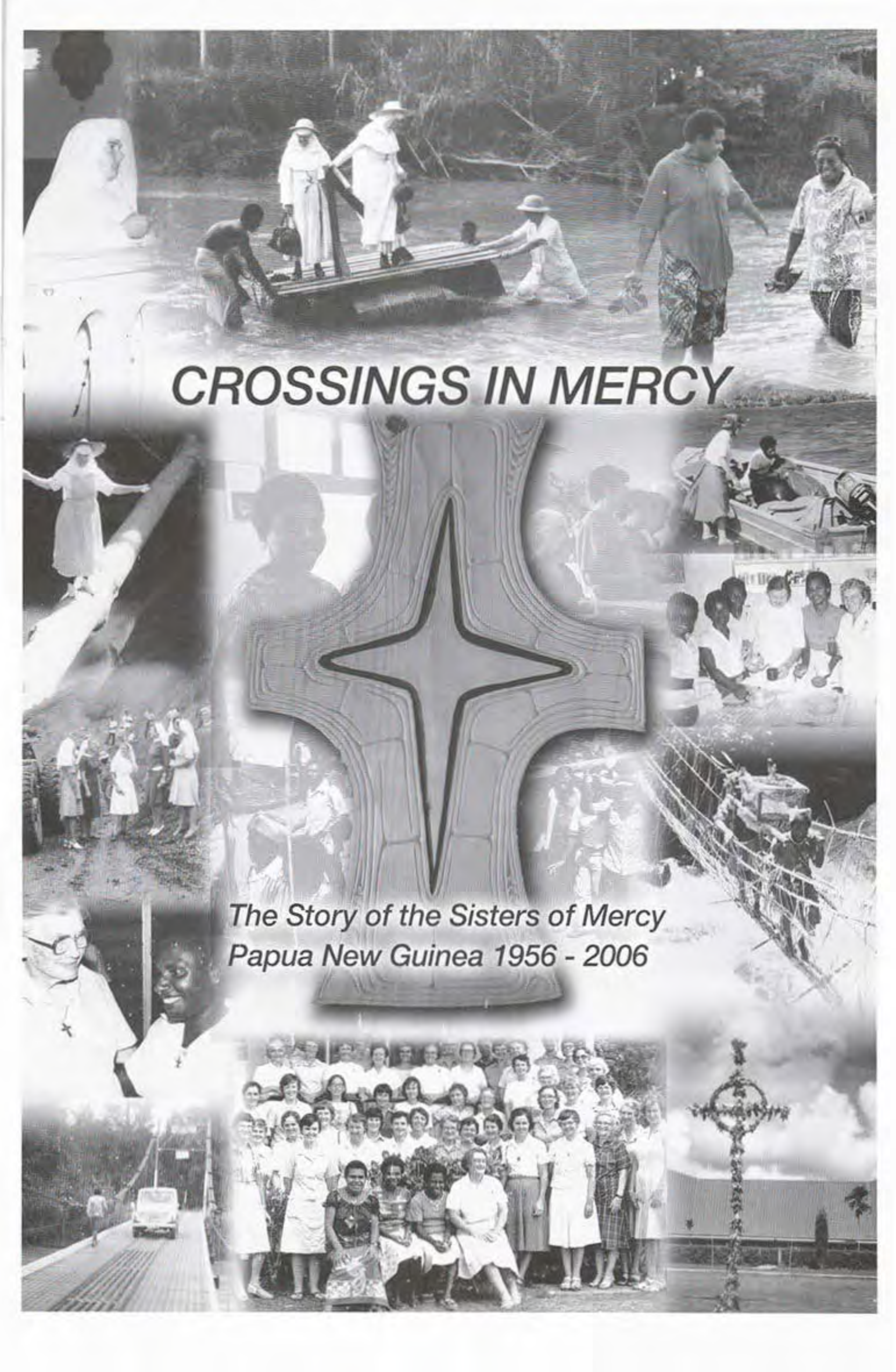
In 1827 Catherine McAuley, an educated lay woman, began charitable work in Dublin on behalf of the poor and the sick – those overlooked by society at the time. From a 'House of Mercy' especially constructed for the purpose in fashionable Baggott Street, Catherine and her companions walked to the homes of struggling families, providing nursing care and hands on help.

Housed in the building, poor servant girls were offered a Christian foundation, sound education and skills training. To ensure continuity of this work within the Catholic Church Catherine agreed to found the religious Order of the Sisters of Mercy (1831).

As inspired and taught by Catherine, the sisters lived out a robust spirituality blending the love and mercy of God in their life and prayer together with meeting God in others, particularly the underprivileged whose lives they sought to improve. The sisters also raised the consciousness of others to work towards more just social conditions. The Order soon spread throughout Ireland and England. Within a few years of Catherine's death in 1841, the Sisters of Mercy, initially following the waves of Catholic immigrants after the Irish famine of 1848, began overseas missions to Newfoundland, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and South America. They continued their pattern of empowering those in need, spiritually, educationally and self-reliantly.

After World War II the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and elsewhere responded to requests from the Church (and the United Nations) on behalf of developing countries, including Papua New Guinea. Impelled by the ideals of spiritual renewal and adaptation recommended by Vatican II (1962-65), Sisters of Mercy reached out in mission to address local and global issues of mercy and justice within and beyond the shores of their own or adopted countries.

The spirituality of Catherine McAuley is seen by many as vibrant and relevant for today's world. The mission she envisaged continues to be lived out by lay men and women who build on the foundations of the Sisters of Mercy in health, education, social and justice ministries. There is a growing conviction, not only among Sisters of Mercy, but also among lay Christians, of Catherine's exceptional holiness. Catherine's life seems to reflect that of a remarkable human being who was led through the love and mercy of God to live in, to reciprocate and to share the divine embrace. In 1990 Pope John Paul II declared Catherine McAuley 'Venerable' – a significant stage in the Catholic tradition of declaring a holy person a Saint.



CROSSINGS IN MERCY

*The Story of the Sisters of Mercy
Papua New Guinea 1956 - 2006*

Dedication

*To the Sisters of Mercy who ministered in Papua New Guinea (1956-2006)
and all you hold in the 'bilum' of your hearts.*

*As women of mercy in your constant call to mission,
you have entrusted me
with your experiences of mingled 'joys and sorrows'.*

*May those who read this commemorative book perceive
some of the harmony of the criss-crossing threads
of courage and blessing
tenderly bestowed on us all.*

Published by: The Sisters of Mercy - Papua New Guinea Region.

Printed by: Openbook Howden Design & Print, 2-12 Paul Street, St. Marys S.A.

Sub-Editor: Ms Stephanie Thomas.

Proof-reading by: Helen O'Brien RSM and Loyola Crowe RSM.

Formatting by: Ms Astrid Sengkey of ATF Press.

Graphic Consultants: Mr Bob Bennett, Sister Rita Hassett RSM, Sister Denise Coen RSM,
Liam Camilleri, Mark Elberg and Anne and Ted Flaherty.

Title Page design: Sister Rita Hassett.

ISBN: 978-0-646-52140-4

First Printed March 2008

Second Print September 2009

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CATHERINE'S CROSSINGS IN MERCY

As she responded to God's love throughout the journey of her life Catherine McAuley faced some hard decisions that were to take her on unexpected paths. In one of her letters (to Sister Mary de Sales, December 20, 1840) she likened these movements, painful though they were, to the steps of crossing over in a dance. "I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like the dance called 'right and left'." In her playful way she gave examples leading her reader through the crossing over, changing places, changing corners and joining hands of partners, taken up in the joy of rhythm, melody and movement of the set dance. She went on to explain: "We have one solid comfort amidst all this tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back." She added in a postscript that she had completed an otherwise arduous task only because a lively spirit inspired her to dance through it. She summarised the journey of life to her sisters: "This is your life, joys and sorrows mingled, one succeeding the other."

Catherine made many crossings as she responded to the call of the Spirit in the cries of the poor. With her gaze on Jesus, she courageously crossed barriers due to differences in age, class and status in society, gender, religion and nationality as she made room for all in her heart. Strengthened by the cross of Jesus, she and the early sisters went forward or stayed back, their hearts centred on God. Her words about the growth of the Mercy congregation show her deep confidence in God: "Thus we go on... flourishing in the very midst of the cross."

The experiences of crossings and the cross feature in the lives of the expatriate and indigenous Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the collective story of the Sisters of Mercy PNG cannot be told without holding these two themes of mission in focus. In reflecting on fifty years of Mercy mission in PNG, Sister Elizabeth Devine, missionary from Ireland to Australia and PNG, and former Perth Congregational Leader, takes up the theme of Catherine's symbol of the dance of Mercy.

Moving in... moving out
Holding on... letting go
On our own... part of the set
Watching... waiting for the beat
Marking time.

Changing partners... changing places
Reaching out... circling round
Leading... following
Stepping sideways... crossing over
Re-forming.

Dancing in tune with
Partners of our choosing... partners not of our choosing
Keeping time with the rhythm of the music and the steps of the dance
until the whole is complete.

Mother Elizabeth Miller
Goroka Leader, 1956



Mercy Woman of Peace

Mother Francis Regis Everingham
Wewak Leader, 1957



Mercy Woman of Faithfulness

Sister Helen O'Brien - First Leader of the Sisters of Mercy PNG 1981



Helen's reflections

From 1956 until today, each Sister of Mercy of Papua New Guinea (PNG), expatriate or Papua New Guinean, has made her own significant and unique contribution to the 'memory bank' of the group. The contributions have been the day-to-day experiences of learning to live as Sisters of Mercy within the Melanesian culture. Those who can access that memory bank can view, reflect on and celebrate these treasured moments of lives lived for the sake of others. There are stories of extraordinary generosity, courage, fidelity, compassion and loving-kindness. There are also stories of extreme violence, fear, anger, selfishness and pettiness. There are stories that make us laugh and others that make us weep.

Many of the sisters will remember the challenge of one of the expatriate sisters who was among those who began work with the people of Kunjingini in the early days. After years of dedicated service, Sister Misericordia returned to Australia in poor health and wrote back to the Papua New Guinean Sisters, urging them to "remember to keep the Mercy flag flying".

Planting the Mercy flag in PNG means bringing together, today just as surely as in 1956, the when, why, how, and where of the wonderful response of so many to the call to carry the message of Jesus' love and Catherine McAuley's social conscience to the people who live in the 'Land of the Unexpected'.

A jubilee offers an opportunity to remember the past with pride and with humility; a chance to give thanks for the present; and a chance to look to the adventure of the future with courage, energy and deep concern for all persons in need.

Sister Mariska Kua, first Leader of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea Region (2006)

Mariska's Reflections. We Melanesians are known as a people whose traditional beliefs are based on myths and legends. From ancient times my people, like others in PNG, already knew the great Spirit, and had their own ways of seeking his protection and power as they asked for blessings – of the spirit of the sun, of the earth, of the water, of the mountains. Stories that come from many different places in our country bring to light the richness of our past and the people's belief in the great Spirit and their longing for well-being and peace.

There is one story, however, of more recent origin, told to me by my father. When he was a toddler, people kept safely within their own boundaries, yet one day the whole village was amazed to see a stranger making his way freely into their enclosure. He was of normal appearance, but there was something about his simple and gentle approach that stopped them from confronting and killing him.



He stayed at my grandfather's house and the people called him Mangruai, which means "We have to see him", because everybody was drawn to him. My grandfather would carry my father to the food gardens, where the adults spent their day working. When they needed a break, they sat and drank water and ate cooked vegetables from a bamboo. While he was here, Mangruai accompanied the people, and they noticed that the bamboo container he touched never got empty, and that there was enough food and drink for everybody. The children wanted to be close to him. Whenever it rained heavily as they were returning home, he was able to stop the rain until everyone got back safely. During a tribal fight he stepped out into the middle to stop the fighting and was unharmed. While he remained among them there was peace. But one day, he told them all that he had to move on. They noticed he had come from the Madang direction, and was headed further into the highlands towards Mt. Hagen. Later when the missionaries came to Simbu my people recognised this man as the Jesus they spoke of in the Gospel.

When the Sisters of Mercy came from Australia they ministered in the large areas of the Highlands in Goroka and Simbu, Enga and Mt. Hagen, and on the Coast in the vast Wewak Diocese, as well as in Aitape and other dioceses. They went where there was need, and they taught us that Mercies are a people who journey onwards to the unknown where the need calls them. We appreciate what they have done in education, health and pastoral work and the way they have touched the people's lives, and helped them to have a better life and to look on a broader level, connecting with other people on this planet. All this we embrace and cherish. The Sisters of Mercy PNG Region has come about largely because of what they have done.

Now we Sisters of Mercy of the new generation of the 21st century have the call of the Spirit to keep the dream and move with our people. A lot of what we see around us is not right. We face issues not so evident in the 1960s, as our people are trapped by social and environmental issues and face each day with pain and struggle. We PNG Sisters, together with our few Sisters from Australia, try to balance living in two worlds of the old and the new. We carry out the traditional ministries of teaching, nursing, pastoral work and hospitality, but in more simple ways beside our people. We are also engaged in development work with women and families, people with disabilities, HIV/AIDS victims and refugees.

Although it is not easy to be a prophetic witness in today's world, I am proud to live in a new spiritual culture with the Sisters of Mercy. This offers us all the hope to look past ourselves and move beyond the boundaries to embrace everybody and all of creation. This is what our Mangruai-Jesus did, leaving his footprints in the soil of my father's village as he moved on to show others the way of sharing, joy and peace.

The Sisters' Jubilee Prayer

"The fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you ... it shall be holy to you."

Leviticus 25:11 – 12

Our lives are blessed once again as we take time to remember that we are a diverse people with a deep fountain of stories and resources. We pray that the stories of our land, of the first vibrant Australian Sisters who came to Papua New Guinea will be remembered and enriched by the telling and will sustain us on our journey.

We give thanks for our Spirit Mother Catherine McAuley who inspired the first Sisters of Mercy who journeyed to our land.

May many young women be inspired to join us the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea. We pray that the joy of this Jubilee year will nourish our hearts always.

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Chapter 1

FOUNDING LINKS WITH IRELAND AND AUSTRALIA

The Papua New Guinea Region of the Sisters of Mercy is a foundation of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. Our beginnings are traced from Catherine McAuley in nineteenth century Ireland. Our story is based within the Catholic Church and mission in three countries - Ireland, Australia and Papua New Guinea.



CATHERINE McAULEY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND

As the nineteenth century dawned, there seemed little hope for the poor of Ireland. Just as in the previous centuries of British domination, Catholics were deprived of religious freedom, land, employment and education. If anything, the social conditions continued to worsen, fuelled by religious discrimination, injustice and exploitation.

There was one well educated young Dublin woman, Catherine McAuley, who pondered with compassion the plight of the poor. She herself had known suffering and homelessness. Her father James had died leaving his wife Elinor with their three young children. Elinor, unable to manage the family's property and wealth, struggled to make a home for the family in different households of close relatives. Although they meant well, as strict Protestants of that era, they had no tolerance for the Catholic faith.

Being deprived of religious symbols at home, Catherine found strength and comfort in imagining tree branches and the crossbeams of the doors and windows as the cross of Jesus. After her mother's early death, Catherine took responsibility for her younger sister and brother, and later on looked after their children as legal guardian. Through these early difficulties and responsibilities in life, Catherine came to see the loving hand of God.

A turning point came in her mid twenties when the Callaghans, who may have been distantly related, came into her life (1803). They were an elderly couple who invited her to come and live with them first in Dublin, and later in their village estate, 'Coolock House'. As their legally adopted daughter, she managed household affairs and was a companion to Mrs Callaghan who suffered poor health. Apart from these duties, they generously allowed her the freedom and means to help relieve the distress of the poor living nearby. *"Catherine learned early to enclose within her own heart the sufferings of others and to feel the pain in others as her own pain."*¹

Another turning point came several years later when, on the death of Mr Callaghan, Catherine was left a substantial fortune from his will. Thereupon, she resolved that her inheritance would be used for the relief and instruction of the poor and that she would build a refuge for distressed women of good character. Trusting in Divine Providence, she organised the building of a large house at Baggot Street on the edge of the fashionable city of Dublin where the poor would be noticed by the rich, and where the young women residents could find employment nearby.



House of Mercy - the present Mercy International Centre.

In due course, the House of Mercy was opened on September 24, 1827 as a school for the Catholic education and training in needlework, laundry work and other domestic services of hundreds of poor young girls and a large residence for homeless girls and women.² Catherine's compassion focused on the 'poor who

need help today³, but her vision was in setting up a social system for the poor to know the love of God and manage their own lives.

Some well educated women of society came to join her – Anna Maria (Mary Anne) Doyle, Georgiana Moore, Frances Warde and Catherine Byrn. These co-workers were attracted by her friendly personality and strong but gentle spirit, and inspired by her ministry of loving care and service. Perhaps without fully realising it, this small band had begun to live out a unique spirituality blending love of God in life and prayer together with meeting God in others, particularly the underprivileged in society, whose lives they sought to improve.

The next turning point in Catherine's life followed swiftly and unexpectedly. The Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, advised Catherine that her work could not continue without the stability of a religious congregation. Catherine, now in her early fifties, saw in this the hand of God. She and two of her young companions, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley, took the decisive step to enter religious life.

The three women knew they were being called to something new in the Church, and after studying various Rules of religious congregations, Catherine chose that of the Presentation Sisters – which was based on the Rule of St Augustine – as the nearest expression of the religious values and practices she and her companions held dear. However, when later writing the Rule, centred around Mercy, Catherine was to make significant changes to emphasise the practice of union and charity and the service of the underprivileged as essential characteristics of her congregation.

After the novitiate formation with the Presentation Sisters at George's Hill, the three women professed their vows. Catherine returned in haste to Baggot Street, anxious to be back among those who had carried on during her long absence. There on December 12, 1831, Archbishop Daniel Murray appointed Catherine McAuley the Superior of the newly formed congregation, the Sisters of Mercy.



Catherine McAuley,
Founder - Sisters of Mercy.⁴

Catherine expressed her reflections on these beginnings in one of her letters:

It commenced with two, Sister Doyle and I. The plan from the beginning was such as is now in practice. In 1827, the House was opened. In a year and a half we were joined so fast that it became a matter of general wonder.

Seeing us increase so rapidly, and all going on in the greatest order almost of itself, great anxiety was expressed to give it stability. We who began were prepared to do whatever was recommended and in September 1830, we went with dear Sister Harley to George's Hill to serve a novitiate for the purpose of firmly establishing it. In December 1831, we returned and the progress has gone on as you know.⁵

The early years of the fledgling congregation were marked by heavy trials of suffering and death as some of the first young sisters, among them some of Catherine's nieces and cousins whom she had adopted, fell victims to tuberculosis and other illnesses of the time, such as cholera and typhoid. Yet, numbers of young women continued to come, eager to enter the new congregation. As the sisters went out into the streets to be with the poor they became known as the 'walking nuns' to distinguish them from the older, more cloistered religious congregations.

Catherine's Crossings in Ireland and England

Bishops of Ireland and England begged Catherine for sisters for their dioceses. She had a heart for the poor, uneducated and oppressed wherever they were, and faced the personal costs involved. Catherine responded generously to these mission requests even though it created an extreme shortage of sisters at the House of Mercy at Baggot Street.

Despite there being disappointments, setbacks and weaknesses in human terms, the hand of God guided the new Institute of Mercy. Catherine continues her reflections:

We now have gone beyond 100 in number, and the desire to join seems rather to increase, though it was thought the foundations would retard it, it seems to be quite otherwise. There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance, or judgement has not impeded, and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God. I could mark circumstances calculated to defeat it at once, but nothing however injurious in itself has done any injury. This is all I could say.

In setting up Mercy foundations in response to the calls of the Church, Catherine, during the last ten years of her life, was called upon to travel the difficult and uncomfortable routes of roads, canals and seas to set up new foundations. However, her profound experience was one of joy and delight. "Hurrah for foundations. It makes the old young and the young merry."⁵

The call for new foundations brought forth a wholehearted, practical, generous and realistic response from Catherine. Entrusting young sisters with leadership in setting up independent foundations, she sent them forth on mission. Despite the difficulties of separation, the Mercy spirit was kept alive by means of letters and visits with one another and particularly with Catherine at Baggot Street.

From her experience, Catherine reflected that making each new foundation was in effect a crossing or a transition that contained its own deep challenges and difficulties.

*"We are founded on the Cross now indeed. I have travelled a hundred miles to meet this Cross, and another has travelled after me."*⁷

*"It has pleased Almighty God to visit us with a large portion of the Cross."*⁸

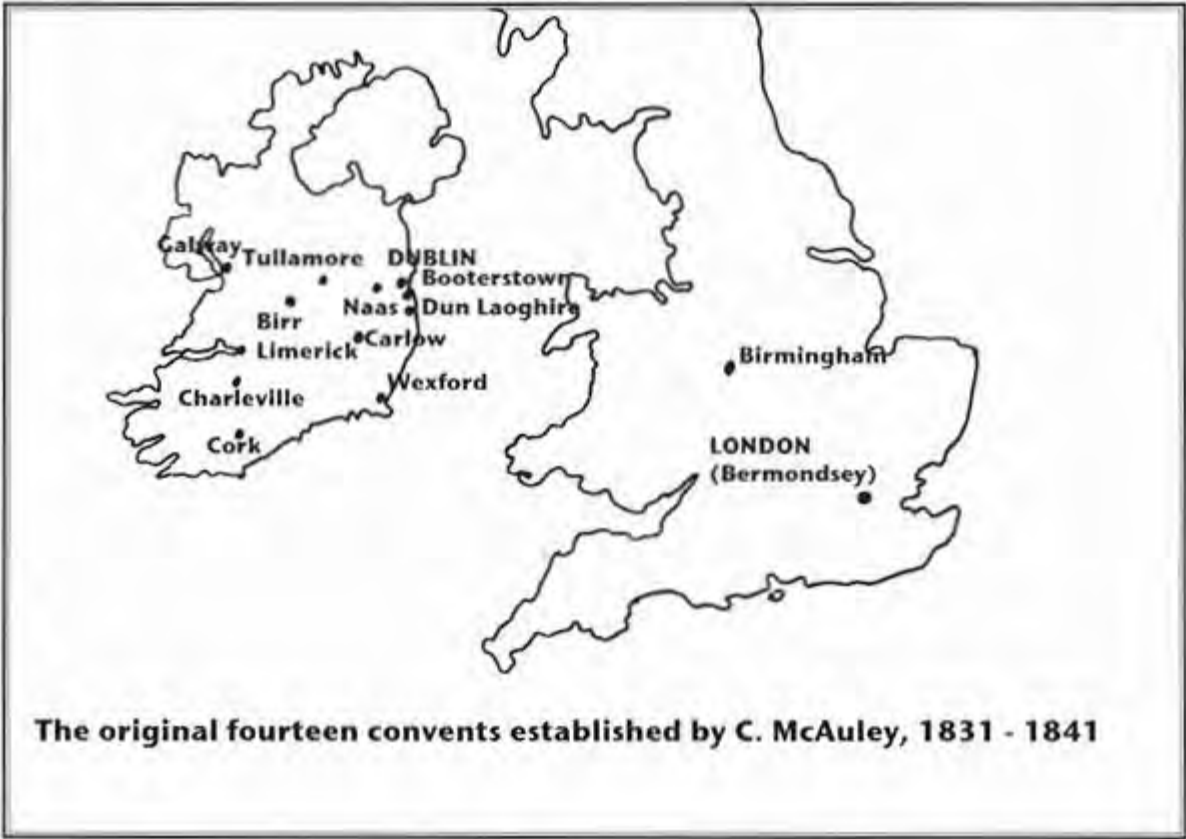
*"Sorrow clings to dear old Baggot Street."*⁹

*"Without the Cross, the real Crown cannot come."*¹⁰

These words, which Catherine expressed to her sisters in conversations, instructions and letters, reflect her experience of life as a cycle of joys and sorrows.¹¹ In embracing the opposites in this cycle of life, she became more deeply bonded with her sisters, her friends and spiritual guides as well as the poor and disadvantaged who drew forth her compassion and ardour for justice. She allowed herself to be held in the boundless embrace and mercy of God.


The rapid growth of the new congregation is captured in the map below, showing fourteen Mercy foundations, twelve in Ireland and two in England.¹²

Thus by the time of Catherine's death, the congregation had taken firm root in Ireland and had made a start in England. A trend of reaching out in a spirit of mission had been established. Among the early sisters involved in leading new foundations across the oceans was a young Irish Sister of Mercy, Ursula Frayne.



URSULA FRAYNE CROSSES THE OCEANS TO AUSTRALIA

We can imagine Ursula Frayne¹³ reflecting on her early years of religious life and ministry, and then her crossing the equator en route to the first foundation in the great south land of Australia. From what we know from readings and Ursula's letters we can imagine her thoughts:¹⁴



"I joined the Sisters of Mercy at Baggot Street in 1836 together with quite a few other young women. We were attracted to Catherine as a person, and a strong bond drew us together as we saw the good being done for so many girls and young women. As novices we were trained by Mother Catherine herself and we soon came to know her as highly educated, intelligent, playful, tolerant of others – a wise and holy woman who was willing to 'do', to 'risk' and to move out bravely to others in loving service.

I was at Baggot Street when Mother Catherine died and it was my sad duty to inform the sisters of her death. But her remarkable spirit lived on, and we carried out her vision beyond the British Isles. In 1842, a year after she died, I was one of the few chosen to go to Newfoundland, where she had wished to go herself. This was my second experience of a new foundation, but my first overseas mission.

A few years after that I, along with two professed sisters, three novices and a postulant made a long and difficult journey on mission to establish the first foundation of the Sisters of Mercy on Australian soil in Perth in 1846. For me it was an incredible experience crossing from the northern to the southern hemisphere at the equator. Once in Perth, we set about our mission – ministering to the convicts, educating children of the settlers, who were mostly Irish immigrants, providing education for Aboriginal children and visiting those in need. In time, and not without our share of difficulties and sufferings, our numbers and ministries grew. In 1857 a small group of us responded to a call from Bishop Goold and we travelled across the seas of the southern coast of Australia to Melbourne."

Sisters of Mercy spread across Australia¹⁵

Many independent Mercy foundations to Australia followed Ursula's lead. These congregations came mostly from Catherine's original Irish and English foundations. One overseas congregation, established in Argentina, faced an uprising of religious persecution and the Irish and Argentinian sisters fled to Ireland, only to respond almost immediately to the request to come to Adelaide. Numbers grew as sisters were recruited from Ireland and vocations flowered within Australia itself. Sisters of Mercy showed concern for the newly arrived immigrants and were keen to respond to the needs of Australia's Catholics. Sisters devoted themselves to ministries of teaching, nursing, care of orphans, visitation and other pastoral and social needs.

However, as they reached out to meet new needs, particularly in providing religious and secular education in town and rural areas across the continent, congregations faced added financial strain. Those in isolated rural areas were finding it difficult to meet standards of religious formation as well as government requirements for professional training in teaching and nursing.

The Australian bishops recommended that independent congregations within dioceses, and even across dioceses, unite. In general, the sisters obeyed and several foundations joined together. For example, thirteen foundations in Victoria, including two from Tasmania united to form the Melbourne Congregation (1908). A surprising and radical amalgamation occurred among far-flung independent Mercy communities in the western region of New South Wales. These groups, which were separated by distance from their original founding groups (e.g. Singleton, Bathurst or Goulburn), joined together to form the Wilcannia-Forbes Congregation (1937) to serve the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese (1887).

These crossings and restructuring of independent houses were often difficult for the sisters involved. While the pioneer sisters cherished and guarded their recollections of Catherine's charism and practices, there were different local interpretations of these as they were passed on. The conservatism in Church and society of the era, by which a strong emphasis was placed on observance of customs, added to the difficulty of these mergers. This made the joining together of foundations a painful process as sisters felt they were letting go of some of their sacred traditions. Yet, it was necessary for the Mercy congregations to do this in order to bring about greater unity and potential for more effective mission.

In reflecting on the various moves throughout Australia, Sister Dorothy Campion, first President of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (1981-1987) comments: "It was not without difficulty that each congregation gave up its independence and learned to merge the distinct and separate cultures which had grown out of their differing backgrounds and founding stories."¹⁶

However, there was to be a momentous reshaping among the Australian Mercy congregations in the post-war years. This was brought about by a commitment to foreign missions, and in particular, to Australia's northern neighbour, New Guinea.



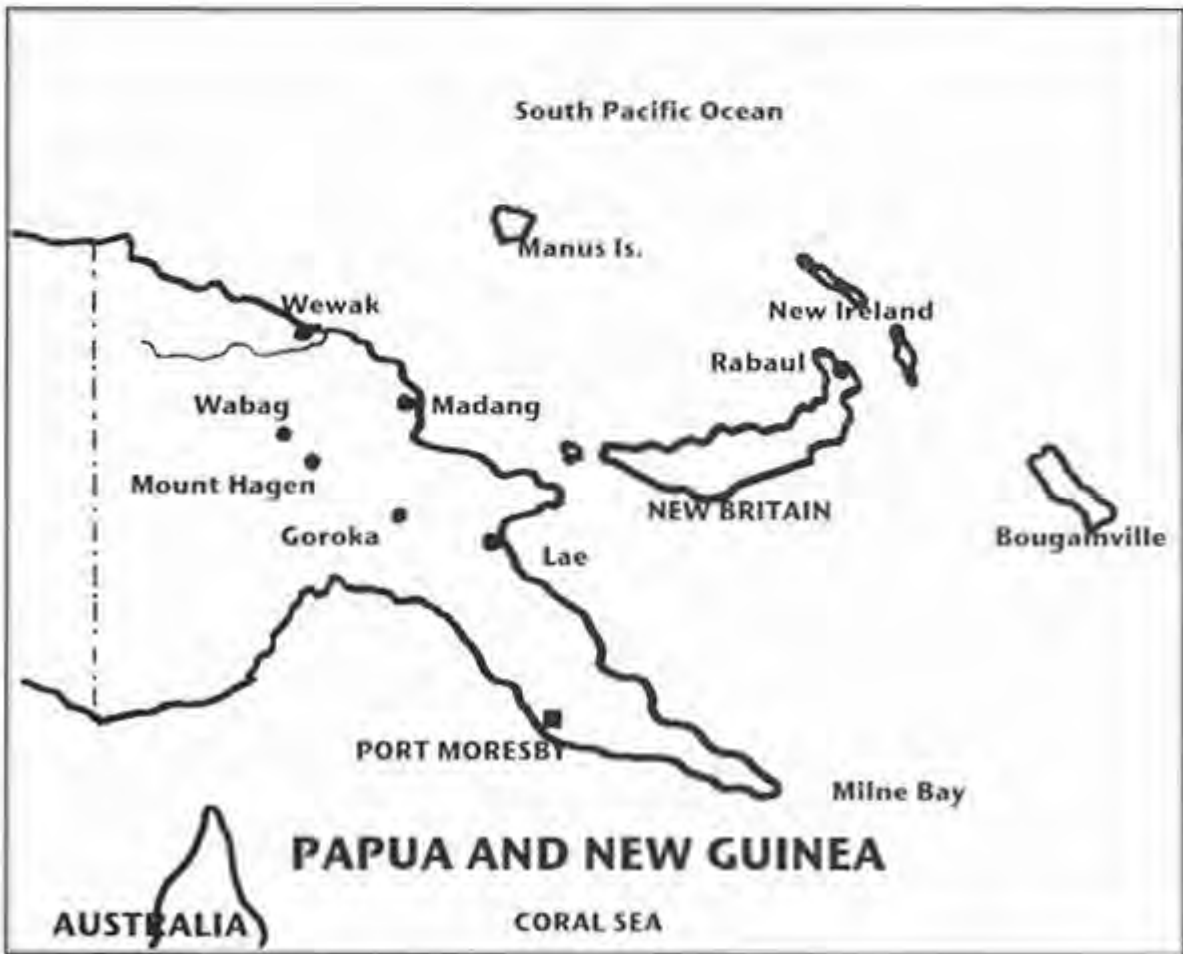
Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.¹⁷

Australian War Memorial negative Number 014028

AUSTRALIAN MERCY SISTERS MOBILISED FOR MISSION IN NEW GUINEA

During the invasion of the Japanese (1942-1945) fierce fighting in the zones in Rabaul, Bougainville, Milne Bay, Kokoda, Wewak and Port Moresby were reported in the media. This brought to Australians a greater consciousness than ever before of the existence of their nearest neighbours. Indigenous men were recruited into the Australian Army in New Guinea and trained as special fighting units. With their knowledge of the environment, along with their experience and skills, these soldiers fought bravely and loyally in assisting the Australian troops. Widespread gratitude was felt for the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" who had saved the lives of so many Australian soldiers and helped deliver Australia from the invaders.

The post-war period was a time of great expansion of mission activity in New Guinea.¹⁸ Despite the severe loss of life and destruction of property, expatriate missionaries returned as soon as permission could be granted by the civil authorities and immediately set about rebuilding mission stations and resuming the work of evangelisation. Among these were the Missionaries of the Divine Word who returned to their mission fields in the Coastal and Sepik River areas of Wewak and the Highlands regions of Goroka and Mount Hagen.



Archbishop Romolo Carboni takes the lead

The urgent mission needs were well understood by Archbishop Romolo Carboni, Apostolic Delegate of Oceania, the pope's representative in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands. From writings and reports, we know the impact this had on the enthusiastic and visionary prelate, and we can imagine his reflections.¹⁹

"I was deeply inspired by the spiritual aims of Pope Pius XII and felt commissioned by him to awaken in the Catholic Church of Australia the desire and commitment to the foreign missions. The Church by its very nature is missionary. Australia, which has previously been considered a mission country, has just been elevated to full status in the Church and the Vatican has stated clearly that Australia now has the responsibility for mission within and beyond its own shores. New Guinea and the islands of the Pacific are in desperate need. The obvious personnel and resources should come from the teaching and nursing orders. But nothing can be done in a collaborative way because there are so many independent and isolated foundations, particularly among the Sisters of Mercy, which is the largest teaching order in Australia. If anything constructive is to be done for the foreign missions, the Sisters of Mercy and other teaching and nursing congregations will need to be united on a national level.

Consequently, with this purpose in mind, I consulted with the various independent foundations of the religious orders in Australia and proposed that they unite in a re-structure. In the case of the 17 different Mercy foundations, I offered the choice of uniting either as a Union, which gave a more centralised form of government, or a Federation, which also bonded the sisters, but in a more flexible way. The sisters readily agreed to follow these suggestions, and as a result, the Sisters of Mercy prepared to form two groups: the Union (1954) and the Federation (1957). The two Leaders were Mother Patricia O'Neill from Melbourne (Union Sisters) and Mother Damian Duncombe from Brisbane (Federation Sisters). Since then, Mother Patricia has set up a Union administration centre at St Anne's in Canberra.

With the restructuring of many religious congregations under way, I appealed for missionary assistance to their leaders at the national level. In 1955, I asked all religious congregations of men and women, even those that did not have a missionary purpose, to help in the development in the foreign missions, particularly through education and health services. Our nearest neighbour New Guinea – its land, peoples and missions – had been devastated in defending Australia in the Pacific War. Also at this time, the Australian Government, urged by the United Nations, was stepping up its involvement in New Guinea. Among the first to respond to my requests, were the Leaders of the Union and Federation groups of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, namely Mother Patricia O'Neill in Canberra and Mother Damian Duncombe in Brisbane."

Union: 1954

Adelaide, Bathurst,
Perth (Victoria Square),
Singleton, Melbourne,
Goulburn, Gunnedah,
Wilcannia-Forbes.

Federation: 1955

Brisbane,
North Sydney, Ballarat,
Cairns, Grafton,
Parramatta, Rockhampton,
Townsville, West Perth.

The Sisters of Mercy respond²⁰

Thus, in response to Romolo Carboni's suggestions, two groups of Sisters of Mercy, according to the will of the sisters, were formed – the Union and the Federation. Negotiations

with Church authorities in Australia and New Guinea soon followed, and within a short space of time, two communities of Mercy Sisters, chosen from a large number of volunteers, prepared for missionary service in New Guinea. The first community from the Union group headed for Goroka in 1956 and the second community of the Federation was bound for Kunjingini in the Wewak Diocese in 1957.

Endnotes

- ¹ Regan, Mary Joanna, RSM, *Tender Courage*, Gwyned Valley, Pennsylvania, 1978, p.6.
- ² Bolster, M. Angela, RSM, *Catherine McAuley, Venerable for Mercy*, Dominican Publications, 1990.
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ From McLay, Anne, RSM, *Women on the Move: Mercy's Triple Spiral: A history of the Adelaide Sisters of Mercy, Ireland to Argentina 1856-1880 to South Australia 1880*, Sisters of Mercy Adelaide, 1990.
- ⁵ Catherine's letter to Sister Mary Elizabeth Moore (January 13, 1839), St Mary's Convent, Limerick.
- ⁶ Brennan, Bonaventure, RSM, *According to Catherine: Words of Wisdom from Catherine McAuley, A Thematic Approach*, Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, 2003, p. 44.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 44.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p. 45.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹¹ Neumann, M. Ignatia, RSM (Ed), *Letters of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841*, Helicon Press Inc, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, 1969.
- ¹² Photo from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne.
- ¹³ The words ascribed to Ursula Frayne and printed in italics have been reconstructed by the author, after reflection on material derived from letters, written reports and recorded events.
- ¹⁴ MacGinley, Rosa M., *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia*, Australian Catholic University, Crossing Press, 1996, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Campion, Dorothy, RSM, *Listen: Journal of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia*, Vol. 23. No. 2, 2005.
- ¹⁶ Photo used with permission, Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Raphael Oenbari leads wounded Digger George 'Dick' Whittington to safety in Papua New Guinea, *The Advertiser*, Saturday, August 6, 2005.
- ¹⁷ Waiko, J.D., *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993.
- ¹⁸ In the text, the words ascribed to Romolo Carboni and printed in italics have been reconstructed by the author after reflection on material derived from letters, written reports and recorded events.
- ¹⁹ Taken from research in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy - ISMA, Brisbane, Melbourne and Mount Hagen. The Federation, approved by Rome on 21st Nov 1955, held its first meeting on 19th Jan, 1956.

Chapter 2

CALLED TO THE UNKNOWN

While the sisters were preparing for the mission to New Guinea, there were many questions in their minds. But there was something they could not have possibly realised. Although they were offering themselves as missionaries to bring Christ and to be of service, and they were expecting hardships, they could not have foreseen the profound holistic effect the people of New Guinea would have on them personally, or on the Sisters of Mercy as a congregation. They had much to give and much to learn in the years ahead.



The Spirit World.¹

PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA: PEOPLES OF ANCIENT MELANESIAN CULTURES



From the time when myths and legends honouring the ancestors were born, the diverse clans in the islands of Melanesia,² including the main island of New Guinea, were sustained by unique cultural and religious systems. For 50,000 years, generations of people were socialised, educated and nourished through strong and enduring cultures. People met their basic needs through the same farming, fishing and hunting skills and practices used by their ancestors. The Highlanders were reputedly among the first gardeners in the world.



Studies in anthropology³ show that traditional Melanesian cultures have different language and inheritance systems. In relation to Papua and New Guinea, there are over 850 different language groups and unique cultures. In general, these may be divided into two kinship groupings. Those with patrilineal kinship forms of organisation trace their ancestry and inheritance of land through successive generations of males to a male ancestor. These clans cover most of the mainland and consist of very large populations, sometimes numbering tens of thousands in the Highlands areas. In contrast, those with a matrilineal kinship organisation trace their descent and inheritance of land through successive generations of women to a common ancestress. These groupings include most of the islands and a few coastal areas and consist of much smaller clan groups.



In practice, traditional societies had their own clearly defined social roles, based on gender, and united and strengthened their community bonds by a network of economic exchanges. In the patrilineal kinship systems, male domination of social and political life was considered essential for the maintenance, preservation and survival of the clan. The mutual relationship of the male members was very strong. They owned the land in common, often lived together in one settlement, and assisted each other in work, ritual enterprises and exchanges. While the domestic roles and responsibilities of women were strongly emphasised, women themselves were excluded from public speaking and decision-making.



Religion was not something apart from daily life, but was integral to it, in the faithful adherence to custom, law, and traditional values and practices of the ancestors.⁴ Fullness of life was seen, not only as something for the present, but also for the future. In the afterlife, the cycle of earthly duties to family and clan having been carried out, mistakes reconciled and clan strength celebrated, all looked forward to being united in harmony and complete life with the ancestors. While the consciousness of the spirit-world, with the many spirits to be appeased, brought respect and fear, the people esteemed and honoured one Spirit above all others.



Some Consequences of Colonialism

The traditional Melanesian way of life began to change when, from the sixteenth century onwards, there were European explorers to the New Guinea islands – Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English and French. The destiny of the people, however, was irrevocably changed by means of ‘foreign intrusion’ in the nineteenth century, and towards the end of the century commercial companies from Germany, Britain, France and Australia were involved in trading operations. With these came government personnel, adventurers, scientists and missionaries.⁵

Furthermore, the link with the industrialised nations and ‘westernisation’ became cemented through colonisation. In 1884, Germany claimed the north-east section of the island, New Guinea, as a protectorate, while the south-east section, Papua, was named as a British protectorate. In 1906, under the Papua Act, adopted by the Commonwealth in 1905, Australia took responsibility for Papua. After World War I, Australia received the mandate to govern New Guinea, referred to as the Mandated Territory.

In their administration of Papua and New Guinea, the Australians concentrated on economic development through tropical crops (copra, cocoa, rubber, sisal hemp, and tobacco) and mining. Very little was done in education and health, and the administration depended on the various Christian missions that had been in the country since the 1880s for these services.

In the late colonial stage, the majority of the people (ninety per cent) supported themselves by subsistence farming in rural areas. However, while men’s workloads had decreased by the replacement of stone tools with steel axes and machinery, the domestic, gardening and child-minding roles of the women had increased.⁶ With the introduction of the cash economy, men

had the opportunity for paid employment.

Women, already working hard with domestic chores, food gardening and child rearing, were further burdened with the need to turn to cash crops to find extra money for the new essentials of clothing and school fees for their children.

Thus, the Sisters of Mercy found themselves in a challenging and changing social and cultural situation when they first set foot in New Guinea.



Highlands Woman.



Coastal Woman.

A GLIMPSE AHEAD (1956-2006)

Welcomed by the People

The pioneer sisters came by invitation of the bishops to a particular place and people. Although they had an ambiguous role, arriving in the late stages of colonisation, they found themselves welcomed and accepted by the people. The sisters were dressed in the full religious habit and veil of the time, which was far from suitable or healthy in the tropical climate. They were subject to the rigours of heat, the onslaughts of malaria and the risks and dangers of travelling on the roads, seas and in the air, and the inner ache of strangeness and isolation. Yet, their Spirit call, fused with that of the people of the land, urged them on.

The contrasts between themselves and their hosts in their new places were very marked. As women from a Christian, Australian and 'western' background, they were professional and capable people entering the lives of people, who as Melanesians, had specialised life skills, dating from the time of their ancestors.

In the mainland areas of the Highlands and the Sepik where the sisters went, the people were of many clans, with their own unique languages and cultures, and sustained by different cultural and religious systems. They were self-reliant through subsistence farming. According to their patrilineal traditions, male clan members were socially very powerful. Men owned the land in common, often lived together and managed public relations, including ritual enterprises and exchanges. Women took the domestic roles and responsibilities, and were excluded from clan decision-making and political roles.

Beginnings on the Mission Stations

Arriving in the country little more than a decade after World War II, the first sisters worked with religious men, the Divine Word Missionaries (known as the SVDs). The majority of these men were from Europe and America, and this international link greatly informed and enriched the missionary approach of the sisters. To their surprise, the sisters found themselves on mission stations with priests and brothers from Germany, their bitter enemy in war but a short time before. These SVDs were to become their pastoral guides and companions in mission as Mercy foundations and communities spread in dioceses under the Church jurisdiction of Divine Word Missionary bishops. Likewise, the friendly and sisterly influence of the pre-war survivors, the Holy Spirit Sisters, in each of these areas, proved supportive and constructive.

The sisters lived in, or near their place of ministry, mostly on established mission stations. Inspired by the vision of parish priests and bishops, and informed through their growing relationship with the people, the sisters made their own professional assessment of the needs, particularly of girls and women.

In circumstances which seemed almost impossible, the sisters used their powers of persuasion to convince parents of the importance of education, self-reliance and employment opportunities for girls and women. They were supported by funding and medical resources from Australia.

Sister nurses made adaptations as, working in under-resourced basic health centres, they were called upon in emergencies to diagnose and perform procedures that would be the prerogative of doctors in first world countries. They carried out extensive bush patrols on foot,

on dangerous roads, and in turbulent seas and rivers. They became managers of health centres, concerned with preventative medicine, health education and training, the use of the people's natural remedies, and the training of indigenous staff. They worked in collaboration with the Catholic Church and Government health authorities, as well as with other Church agencies.

Political Independence

By 1960, Papua and New Guinea was basically a Christian country. The Christian churches, such as Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican and the London Missionary Society, which had operated in the country virtually from the beginning of mission activity in the latter part of the nineteenth century, consolidated and expanded their influence. Other Christian denominations and sects had been introduced also.

It was not until the late sixties and early seventies that Australia, as a colonial power, stepped up its responsibilities to Papua and New Guinea.⁷ During this time, the Australian Labor Government made a commitment to a 'New Deal' for Papua New Guinea, emphasising the priority to be given to the interests of the local population and to the "educational, economic, and political progress of the people". This was an expression of a "debt of gratitude" owed by Australia for the contribution that Papuans and New Guineans had made during World War II. It was also in keeping with world opinion which had shifted against colonisation, and in this new climate, many African and Asian colonies succeeded in gaining independence.

Eventually, urged by the United Nations, the Australian administration put in motion economic and education policies to prepare the country for political independence. For the first time, there was a serious injection of government funding for the purpose of overall development. In the early fifties, after seventy years of neglect of education, the pendulum was set in favour of formal primary education (in preference to vocational or technical education). The government established its own primary schools, reduced the financial assistance to church schools and took greater control over the missions' activities. Coping with 850 different vernaculars proved too daunting, and in the interests of promoting national unity, English was declared the medium of instruction. Health services also received attention, particularly in the government centres and in the recently opened highlands areas where half of the country's population lived.

Within a relatively short time self-government was granted (1973), followed by Independence on September 16, 1975. The new island nation took the name of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and proudly adopted its own flag. The architects of the Constitution were the members of the Constitutional Planning Committee led by the ex-officio Chair, the Prime Minister and former Catholic teacher, Michael Somare, and the de facto Chair and Catholic priest, John Momis, later known as the 'father' of the Constitution⁸. The parliamentary committee received very valuable contributions from several other young educated people, including a young lawyer, Bernard Narokobi and Catholic priest, Ignatius Kilage. The written Constitution endorsed the traditional values and Christian principles as the foundation for the new nation state.

Among the traditional values, expressed as 'Melanesian ways', were reverence for the spirit world and the spirits of the ancestors, commitment to family and clan lived in obedience to custom and law, respect for elders, and care and preservation of the environment and hospitality.⁹ A notable difference was the new emphasis placed on equal participation of women.

INDEPENDENCE



GERMANY



1884 - 1914



GREAT BRITAIN



1884 - 1901



JAPAN



1942 - 1945



AUSTRALIA



1901 - 1975



our our our
FLAG - COUNTRY - PEOPLE

Papua New Guinea

Changes in the Catholic Church

Soon after settling in and carrying out their educational and health ministries, the sisters found themselves influenced by forces within the Catholic Church and within the country which was heading towards self-government and independence.

There were profound changes and developments in the Catholic Church over the fifty-year period (1956-2006), particularly the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This was initiated by Pope John XXIII and concluded by Pope Paul VI. Significant reforms consisted in shifting the emphasis from a clerical model of Church to the 'People of God' through building up the lay rights, responsibility and participation; engaging in inculturation – a process of seeking expressions of Christianity within the various cultures; celebrating the liturgy in the language of the people rather than in Latin; promoting the growth of the Church, through local priests and religious brothers and sisters, encouraging the use of the Bible, and establishing a new and positive relationship with non-Catholic denominations and non-Christian religions.

The Catholic Church in PNG conducted its own Self-Study (1972-1975) to determine local, diocesan and national issues and concerns, and Sisters of Mercy took a significant part in this process. Within the context of its major finding 'We are the Church', local issues of the family, ministry training of catechists and Church workers, formation of priests and seminarians, and the rights, responsibilities and participation of the laity were identified, giving more concrete direction to the vision of the growth of the local Church as the 'People of God'. No longer was the Church to be seen primarily as a hierarchical institution. This exercise of the Self-Study proved to be a significant follow-up to the Vatican Council and a major source of renewal within the country.

New Institutes were formed to examine the implications of these new directions. At Goroka there were the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service (MI) and the Liturgical and Catechetical Institute (LCI). Of tremendous significance was the establishment in Port Moresby of the Xavier Institute of Missiology for Women Religious of PNG and the Solomon Islands in 1971. Through Xavier Institute, the teachings of Vatican II, particularly in relation to the renewal of religious life, were absorbed by scores of young women religious and the many men religious who later joined in the programs. Among the staff and students of these institutes were Australian and PNG Sisters of Mercy.

The Australian Sisters of Mercy in PNG

The restructuring of the Australian Sisters of Mercy into Union (1954) and Federation (1955) allowed for greater collaboration and unity within each group, and this advantage to the mission development can be seen as the early foundations were maintained and assisted by their Australian congregations, according to the Union or Federation structure. The Goroka-Simbu sisters were engaged in inter-congregational living from the start, while the Federation Sisters in Wewak and Enga-Mount Hagen were mostly from the Brisbane and North Sydney congregations respectively. There were exceptions, however. The second foundation at Torembe began as an inter-congregational foundation, but, as sisters succumbed to tropical illness, they were later replaced by sisters from Brisbane. The Rockhampton and Townsville congregations had their own foundations at Yangoru and Negrie in the Wewak Diocese.

In the fifty-year period (1956-2006), 178 Sisters of Mercy from all of the Australian Congregations ¹⁰ (including one from New Zealand) served in PNG. The majority of these sisters were Australian born, but a significant minority were Irish sisters from the different Australian congregations.

By the time of Independence, the Sisters of Mercy had been in the country for nineteen years and were in three large dioceses – Goroka (including Simbu), Wewak and Mount Hagen (including Enga). They lived in, or near their place of ministry, and, as guests in the land, did not lease any land or own property of their own. They were part of the unfolding events in society.

Moves towards unity

The seeds of change propagated by political independence (1975) burst forth in the late 1970s. As sisters under Union, Federation and Conference¹¹ crossed diocesan boundaries to meet the needs of the local Church and emergent nation, it became increasingly evident that their mission involvement would be more effective if they were unified and could act and speak with one voice. There was also the growing realisation, both in PNG and in Australia, that Sisters of Mercy shared the same spirit and mission of mercy and justice. Such was the force of these convictions that the Highlands and Coastal sisters formed two groups and collaborated in their efforts towards unification in 1979.



Veronica Lokalyo, Petronia Gawi and Theresia Gongi.

Young PNG women join the Sisters of Mercy

Towards the end of 1979, three young women – Petronia Gawi and Theresia Gongi from the Sepik area, and Veronica Lokalyo from Enga – expressed a firm desire to be Sisters of Mercy. They did this independently of each other, and when the suggestion was made that they join one of the indigenous congregations each one, in turn, insisted that she wanted to follow the Sisters of Mercy, the ones she had come to know over the years. With different Australian founding congregations, the formulation of a single formation policy posed a problem. However, with characteristic

Mercy pragmatism, a growing sense of the Spirit at work, and united in a common hope and purpose, Highlands and Coastal sisters tackled both the issues of unity and formation. They organised combined gatherings and faced the hard decisions. Thus it happened that the question of a combined formation policy for the Sisters of Mercy became a compelling force. Trusting in the wisdom of the Spirit, and encouraged by the Australian leaders, the PNG leaders accepted the three young women in their postulancy in April 1980, with the

arrangement that the Brisbane Congregation would take responsibility for their future entry into the Mercy Congregation. This significant event, together with the presentation of the draft Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia by Sister Anne McLay, took place at the first united gathering of sisters in Wewak. That these events occurred all at once was seen by the sisters as highly significant, confirming the guiding presence of the Spirit.

The Australian Institute of the Sisters of Mercy

Meanwhile, the Australian leaders, who had become increasingly concerned about the complexities of the situation for their overseas sisters in terms of further recruitment, were themselves caught up in moves towards unification which had accelerated as a consequence of the National Assembly of the Conference in 1977. A structure whereby the Sisters of Mercy would be united in one Institute was being devised and it was not long before the two major Leaders of the Conference, Sisters Valda Ward (Federation) and Dorothy Campion (Union) presented the details of this proposition for official approval to Rome. Governance, in the Mercy tradition, rather than being highly centralised, as was the case with most religious orders, was to remain with the local congregations, with the role of the Institute Leadership Team more in the nature of animation and guidance. Fortunately, this was a concept of governance in the Benedictine tradition, and in that light, was eventually understood and accepted by Rome in 1981. In the meantime, the Conference encouraged and supported the sisters in their moves towards unity for the sake of the mission in PNG.

Sisters of Mercy PNG unite in 1981

In their combined elective National Assembly in July 1981, the sisters founded under Union (Goroka), Federation (Wewak – Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville, and Mount Hagen-Enga – North Sydney) and Conference (Aitape) united to form one structure – the Sisters of Mercy of PNG. The proposals for recognition of this new structure, with the implication of local autonomy, were made to the Australian leaders. However, these proposals could not be



Sisters Margaret Bubb, Julie Anne Ryan, Helen O'Brien, Clare Gilchrist and Val Cervetto.

officially granted until the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, although canonically approved in June, was officially formed in December later that year. Thus it happened that formation preceded PNG unification, and PNG unification preceded Australian unification! Surely the sequence of events seemed in logically reverse order!

The elected leader of the combined group of sisters at Goroka was Sister Helen O'Brien. The granting of local autonomy meant authority would mainly be exercised by the national leader, who had the benefit of understanding the context of PNG. Helen began the vital task of drawing the bonds of unity together among the previously separate groups and requesting sisters to leave familiar places for the sake of building up the whole. The Mercy mission spread out from the original foundations from Australia across several dioceses. These included Goroka, Kundiawa (Simbu), Wewak, Mount Hagen, Wabag (Enga), Aitape, Madang, Port Moresby and Rabaul (New Britain) and Kavieng (New Ireland), as shown in the Appendix.

The three new postulants were on their way to join an Australian Mercy group that would make a foundation in Pakistan in 1984 and was increasingly being drawn into the worldwide networks of the Sisters of Mercy. After the impetus of the first global gathering at Trocadero in Dublin in 1981, including indigenous sisters from Africa, South America, Guam, the Philippines and independent South Pacific nations, the bonding of Mercy sisterhood developed in an amazing way, eventually leading to the establishment of the Mercy International Centre at Baggot Street, Dublin, Ireland in 1994. This 'centre-ing' of the sisters, as distinct from a 'centralisation' of governance, allowed for a growth in union and understanding of the Mercy life and spirit. It encouraged the flowering of indigenous cultures and autonomy that was occurring among the sisters in the developing countries.

However, in 1980 the three Mercy postulants were starting a journey very much grounded in PNG. They were each coming from unique clans and cultures of their own. In their resolve to live out gospel values with Melanesian expressions of Mercy, they, and the PNG women who were to follow them, would undertake the difficulties and challenges, not only of cross-cultural living with Australian and Irish sisters, but also of living with cultural differences among themselves.

Steady growth of PNG Sisters of Mercy

Expatriate numbers declined from 44 in 1981, leaving twelve at the turn of the century and eight in 2004. The numbers of PNG sisters, however, slowly but steadily grew over the twenty-five year period. The PNG vowed Mercy women of today have adjusted to the changing needs as did the expatriate sisters before them. They are women of spiritual vision who are well educated, qualified practitioners carrying out the ministries of formal education, teacher education, tertiary distance education, nursing and health education, pastoral work in town and rural areas, HIV/AIDS counselling, rehabilitation and education, secretarial management, hospitality and domestic management, and development work with women. They interpret these ministries in the light of their deep understanding of the culture and their people. While most live in small Mercy communities, a minority live in inter-religious or inter-faith settings. All seek to create bonds of closeness and collaboration with those in shared ministry and through their inter-dependence with one another in the Mercy family of the region.

Despite their small numbers, the national sisters have taken responsibility for the growth

of the Sisters of Mercy PNG, by holding responsible positions in formation and leadership, commitment to vocations promotion, and through valiantly meeting the needs of their people in viable ministry in the Mercy way of life. It is only because of this that the canonical requirements for granting the status of Autonomous Region could be met.

The long-held desire to become an Autonomous Region

The principle of the growth towards becoming an Autonomous Region had been long held by the sisters in PNG and in Australia. As a result of a resolution of the 1987 PNG National Assembly, a combined task force was set up to explore the needs of the emerging congregation. Their findings, pursued in the 1990 Assembly, show the clear direction towards an autonomous congregation:

Being an autonomous congregation will enable us to be, and to be recognised as a more authentic part of the local Church of Papua New Guinea. This recognition of a distinct identity is merely the formalising of the reality, a development that has already taken place.¹²

The sisters were keen to work towards meeting the canonical requirements of an Autonomous Region to reflect the stability, responsible stewardship and Mercy mission being exercised within PNG. Stable, though different, forms of governance had guided religious life and ministry in the preceding quarter of a century (1956-1981). The approach to Mercy mission of the different groups from Australia was similar and reliable, leading to the liberation and empowerment of people through the authentic spirit of the gospel, in line with the Catholic teaching and tradition. The sisters had long felt united among themselves in the Mercy spirit and charism of Catherine McAuley. There were some sisters serving in each of the dioceses who added stability and cohesion to the whole.

Other reasons given for the request were related to the rapid localisation and the need for the national sisters to be prepared in the case of any political situation calling for the withdrawal of expatriates. With the PNG nation following a Western mould, the establishment of a multicultural congregation was seen "as a countersign, transcending national barriers and giving witness to the universality of the Church".¹³

Request for the status of Autonomous Region (2004)

Within the term of the first indigenous Leader, Sister Mariska Kua, a momentous development took place in 2004. This was the formal request to the Institute for recognition of the status of 'Autonomous Region' for the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea.

Proclaiming the new status of Autonomous Region: 2006

In 2006, the status of Autonomous Region of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia was granted by Rome. The official papal letter was communicated by the President of the Institute, Sister Nerida Tinkler, on the occasion of the fifty years' celebration in Goroka in May 2006. In a spirit of thanksgiving, expressing joy and awe, this was received by Sister Mariska Kua, on behalf of all the Sisters of Mercy of the PNG Region.

A season of Jubilee: 2006-2007

The Sisters of Mercy chose to celebrate the fifty-year period of God's blessings, to encompass the beginning of the two original foundations in the Highlands at Goroka in 1956 and on the Coast in Wewak in 1957. Pioneers and early missionary sisters were invited by Sister Mariska to travel northwards to celebrate with the sisters and with the people of PNG. They were given an outstanding welcome in the best cultural traditions in liturgy, ritual, music, singsings, feasting and words of appreciation. In a spirit of pilgrimage, the visitors went to many places of former ministry and experienced this unique reception by the people wherever they went. Former friendships were renewed, and hearts swelled in praise of God's loving mercy across the lands of Papua New Guinea and Australia.



Sisters Nerida Tinkler and Mariska Kua - the Sisters of Mercy PNG Region - 2006.

Endnotes

- ¹ 'Spirit World', a sand-painting by PNG artist, Tito Kumi.
- ² Melanesia includes Papua New Guinea, West Irian, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia.
- ³ Whiteman, D. L. (Ed.), *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: A Handbook for Church Workers*, Book One of a Trilogy, *Point Series No 5*, Melanesian Institute, 1984.
- ⁴ Mantovani, E., SVD, *Divine Revelation and the Religions of PNG: A Missiological Manual*, Goroka, Melanesian Institute, 2000 and Narokobi, B., *Law and Custom in Melanesia*, *Point Series No. 12*, Institute of Pacific Studies of University of South Pacific & Melanesian Institute, 1989.
- ⁵ Waiko, J. D., *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- ⁶ Researchers: Mandie, A., "Institutional and ideological control of gender in a transitional society", in P. King; P.W. Lee, and V. Warakai, (Eds.), *From Rhetoric to Reality, Papua New Guinea's Eight Point Plan and National Goals after a Decade, Papers of the Fifteenth Waigani Seminar*, Papua New Guinea, University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985, pp. 166-171. Nagari, Y., "Women, education and development" in P. King; P.W. Lee and V. Warakai, (Eds.), *From Rhetoric to Reality, Papua New Guinea's Eight Point Plan and National Goals after a Decade, Papers of the Fifteenth Waigani Seminar*, Papua New Guinea, University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1985, pp. 115-120.
- ⁷ Waiko, J. D., *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 126.
- ⁸ This information was confirmed by John Momis, newly appointed Ambassador to Beijing, in Port Moresby, June 2007.
- ⁹ Preamble of the Constitution, *The Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea*, Government of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, September 16, 1975.
- ¹⁰ These sisters had originally been recruited for missionary service by Mercy leaders of the Australian congregations as postulants, novices or professed sisters or as young women intending to enter the Sisters of Mercy. By 1970, there was a decrease in numbers from Ireland, and eventually this practice of recruiting sisters for Australia was discontinued. Bernadette Rodgers from New Zealand has published *Paradise Time, Letters from Papua New Guinea*, Orca Publishing Services, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2000.
- ¹¹ The significance of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy, formed in 1967, is briefly explained later in this chapter.
- ¹² From the minutes of the 1990 Assembly of the Sisters of Mercy PNG.
- ¹³ Report presented and approved at the PNG Sisters Assembly, 1990.



Chapter 3

UNION MERCY SISTERS TO GOROKA – 1956

The story now resumes with Mother Patricia O'Neill of St Anne's Canberra, contemplating Archbishop Romolo Carboni's request in 1955 for sisters for Goroka in New Guinea.¹ Shortly after, on being informed of her positive response, Archbishop Adolf Noser of Alexishafen, was eagerly anticipating the arrival of the sisters. The four sisters chosen, with Sister Elizabeth Miller as Leader, were preparing for their departure.



Archbishop Carboni, Sisters Marie (Mary Paul) Dagg, Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll, Elizabeth Miller and Algra (Julian) Clarke.



Sisters Marie Dagg, Irene Carroll, Algra Clarke and Elizabeth Miller.

FROM CANBERRA TO THE GOROKA DIOCESE (1956-)

We can imagine the thoughts of Mother Patricia, Archbishop Noser and the new Leader of the Mercy mission, pondering the future.

Mother Patricia responds from Canberra:



"Archbishop Romolo Carboni has just approached me for sisters for New Guinea. He has recently returned from Goroka, where the Highlands headquarters of the Australian administration has recently been established. The Australian Catholics begged him for sisters for the education of their children. He sees this as a need for the Church there - to help educate leaders guided by Christian principles in their relationships with the indigenous people. It is also an opening for mission with the indigenous population.

Although this request comes at a time when we are hard pressed for teachers in our schools, and we do not have lay teachers, or any form of government subsidy, how can we refuse? This will be a test for us all in our newly formed Union - but I feel we can count on the sisters and school children, as well as lay Catholics, to raise money to support this, our first overseas mission. Archbishop Noser in Madang has asked for three sisters, but as so many sisters are in favour of the mission and have volunteered to go there, I think I'll send four - so there is at least one sister for the indigenous children. I believe the situation in Goroka is urgent and the sisters need to be there in January next year."

The sisters prepare to leave

The four sisters were chosen from the many who volunteered from the provinces. A few days before their departure Mother Patricia arranged for the missionaries to meet at Malabar, the Sydney Convent of Mercy of the Gunnedah sisters, so they would get to know one another. They had a simple but moving missioning ceremony in the convent and the Apostolic Delegate presented them with a special crucifix blessed by Pope Pius XII. All were in high spirits and were looking forward to their missionary work.

Archbishop Noser anticipates the sisters' arrival in Goroka:



"I am delighted with the news that English-speaking sisters will be coming to Goroka. After the War, our SVDs are building up our missions once again, but we are desperately short of personnel. I have my mission headquarters here at the coast at Alexishafen near Madang, but my responsibilities stretch south to Lae and across to the Eastern Highlands and Simbu. Goroka is the administration headquarters and gateway to the vast Highlands area. It is important to build up the Catholic faith among the civic population and townspeople there. But it will not be easy for the sisters. According to government policy, the country is divided into separate spheres of influence for the different

Churches, and Goroka is in a Lutheran area. The pioneer Divine Word priests entered the Highlands from the north near Mount Wilhelm and as most mission stations are in the heavily populated Catholic area of the Simbu Goroka seems like an outpost to them.

I'm afraid there's not even a church or a convent built in readiness for the sisters. But, I have a zealous and hard-working priest in Father Fontana, and he will make them welcome. He has assured me they can live in his permanent house, which he has just completed, and he will live in a bush hut at the back of the church property."³

Mother Elizabeth Miller reflects on the Goroka beginnings:

"It was a concern to me to find that I was appointed Superior and we seemed to know so little about the situation ahead of us. However, nothing could dampen our enthusiasm and we set out on our journey northwards, with brief stops at Moresby where we met the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and Alexishafen, the vicariate headquarters, where we met Archbishop Noser, the Holy Spirit Sisters and the newly-formed national Congregation of the Sisters of St Therese. After a short stay, his Grace accompanied us to Goroka where we arrived on January 30, 1956.

The first six months proved a hard and uncertain time for all of us. There was no convent, no school, and no prospect of missionary contact. Father Fontana vacated his house for us and lived in a small hut while he completed the building of St Mary's Church, levelled the nearby slopes which Archbishop Noser called Mount Mercy, and constructed buildings for the convent, boarding school and classrooms.



Father's zeal was directed towards the European population, and while we were pleased to teach these children, first at the back of the church, and later at St Mary's School on the convent property, we were very disappointed to find that he had made no plans for a school for the indigenous children. Furthermore, he had devised a plan for a boarding school for students from the whole of the country.

Sadly, he was forced to go to the United States suffering with cancer. His successor, Father Bodnar, continued with his plans and the boarding school was eventually built. Although we were not in favour of it, our protests went unheeded. As it happened, Father was never able to attract the numbers anticipated to make it a going concern and the total number of boarding pupils there never exceeded 10! When the government offered a new boarding school subsidy for secondary education in Australia, parents preferred to send their children to Catholic and other Christian boarding schools there."⁴



Mother Elizabeth and school children of St. Mary's Catholic School, Goroka.

The first Catholic primary school for indigenous children in the Goroka Area



Sister Marie Dagg describes the beginnings of Sacred Heart School, Faniufa:

"Mother Patricia came up to see us after a few months and made the point to Archbishop Noser, that as she had given an extra sister for missionary work, a school should begin as soon as possible. In August, I was authorised with that task and began teaching at the back of the North Goroka Church. The class was a very small group of 20 students because the priest would only allow 10 desks. Land for a school was offered by a small boy at Faniufa village, Joseph Aswo, who said: 'Come to my place and my people will give you land for a school.' So it was the people of Faniufa Village, on the outskirts of Goroka, who gave

us the land. Once the land agreement was completed work began on a bush classroom. Sacred Heart School Faniufa was blessed and opened on January 28, 1957.

Since then, our school has been developing rapidly. We are now assisted by male national teachers and lay missionaries. The majority of students are boys, but, unlike other schools, there is a good proportion of female students. The parents say they do not want to send their daughters to the government schools because the teachers there are all male, but they know the sisters will look after them here.

A permanent office and two classrooms have been built in Kama village by a national carpenter, who knew something about building, and was supervised by Bill O'Brien, a coffee plantation owner. So I did something I had never done before in my life. I went out and got gravel and cement and the boys and I made the 109 cement blocks for the foundation of the school. I put a miraculous medal in each one. That's probably why it's still standing! As two more sisters have arrived, Patrice (Margaret Clarke) and Marie Loreto (Ursula Gilbert), the school has grown and is now being used by the education department as a demonstration school. Recently, Sister Ursula's father and uncle have been here to build two new permanent classrooms."⁵



Sister Marie Dagg (L), M. Patrick (R) and teachers - Sacred Heart School, Faniufa.

New visions for Goroka: a new Diocese

Within a few years, the sisters found themselves at the centre of missionary activity with the arrival of Father Harry McGee SVD from the United States and the appointment of Bernard Schilling as Bishop of Goroka. Father Harry McGee eagerly adapted to the needs of the situation as a pastor on the ground and a pilot in the air.



Father Harry McGee makes his plans known:

"I can see the urgent need for us all in the Church and religious community at Goroka to be a missionary presence. This is so in the town itself which is growing rapidly. The sisters are very anxious to serve as a Christian presence as teachers within the surrounding villages which are mainly Lutheran, but where there are pockets of Catholic Simbu workers on the coffee plantations. I can also see that the villagers who give land for a school expect that the school should be open to all children, not just the Catholics. On the other hand, it is not our role to try to make conversions. I have suggested to the sisters: 'Let us be a presence among the people – north, south, east and west of Goroka', and they did not wait to be asked twice!"⁶

In 1959, Bernard Schilling was appointed the first bishop of Goroka. Goroka was no longer a mission outpost, but the headquarters of the vast areas of the Eastern Highlands and Simbu. George Greathead, a prominent coffee grower, arranged for the transfer of the lease of some of his property for the diocesan centre at Kefamo on the Goroka town boundary. Bishop Schilling encouraged a friendly, co-operative spirit among the missionaries.

The sisters begin new schools beyond Goroka in 1960

By the late 1950s, the first attempts at the construction of the ever-shifting Highlands Highway, linking coast and highlands, were underway. By today's standards, the 'highway' seemed merely the joining and widening of narrow bumpy tracks ever prone to bogging and landslides in the wet season, but its construction enabled the sisters, with Father McGee's initiative and encouragement as parish priest, to venture forth to new schools in the bush areas beyond the Goroka boundary. The new schools of Tafeto, Katagu and Yamiufa were distances of 12 to 15 kilometres from Goroka, and the sisters were able to travel along the highway with relative ease before embarking on the far more problematic 'side' roads to the schools. Opening a new school meant winning the people's approval for the school, gaining access to suitable land and negotiating its lease, arranging the construction of school buildings, finding teachers and selecting pupils from the throngs of youngsters yearning to go to school. The lion's share of this was done by the sisters.

The sisters' involvement is recorded as follows:⁷

- Sister Irenaeus Carroll began St Therese's School and Church at Tafeto, west of Goroka.
- Sister Mary Julian Clarke opened Katagu School in the Bena District, south-east of Goroka.
- Sister Mary Patrick Mahoney managed supervision of Religious Education at Yamiufa

School at the foot of the Daulo Pass. Lay missionaries, Cecily Everding and Margaret Dahl opened this school.

- In 1961, a Catholic school was started across the Kamaliki River at Yabiufa village, with an indigenous teacher, John Olkande as Head Teacher. The sisters helped to supervise the teachers at this school.

Lay missionary pioneers work with the sisters

The new-found missionary activity brought tremendous joy and new challenges. The number of sisters increased with the arrival of Sister Mary (Antonita) Gleeson, Sister Mary Emily (Dorothy Anne Harrick), Sister Mary Patrick, Sister Margaret (Patrice) Clarke and Sister Mary Loreto (Ursula) Gilbert. Lay missionaries came, many of whom were former students or teachers from Mercy schools in Australia. Audrey Stainsby came up originally on holiday to see her cousin, Sister Mary Antonita, and stayed to be in charge of health care at Tafeto for many years and co-worker and companion of Sister Mary Irenaeus. Early lay missionaries in the Goroka Diocese from Australia were Mollie Bird (St Mary's) from Singleton, Lisa Pighetti (St Mary's) from Melbourne, Margaret Dahl (Yamiufa) from Adelaide and Carmel Tormey (Yamiufa) from Perth. Later arrivals were Mary Jaier (Faniufa), Anne Lowndes (Faniufa) and Mary O'Loughlin (Kamaliki), while Jose Koch (Tafeto) and Cecily Everding (Yamiufa) were from Europe. Mother Elizabeth's sister Kathleen came to help out with the teaching at St Mary's.



Sanctuary - North Goroka Church.

Sudden disaster

Tragically, Father McGee was killed in a plane crash in 1962 when, as pilot of a light aircraft, he lost visibility in heavy cloud while returning from Madang, and missed the Bena Gap which led into the Goroka valley. The incident was reported in the national newspaper.⁸

GOROKA TRAGEDY – PLANE CRASHES – PRIEST KILLED

Father McGee was last heard from at approximately 11:30 am when he radioed the DCA tower that he was at the Bena Gap flying at 13,500 feet.

The search, at first, was centred around the Bena area until a report reached DCA from the overseer at the power station at the water-race that natives had seen a plane crash in that area.

Immediately the search planes were diverted and at 1:15 pm a Cessna piloted by veteran New Guinea flier, Mr Bobby Gibbes, located the wreckage near the top of Mt Gisauo only a few minutes flying time from Goroka.

A ground rescue party comprising Dr Reid and Messrs Clapworthy, Bolton and Burfoot set out immediately taking medical supplies.

Due to bad weather they were unable to reach the scene of the crash before nightfall. They arrived next morning and found that Father McGee had not survived the crash.

His body was brought to Goroka and was later taken

to Alexishafen to be interred.

POPULAR PRIEST

Until recently Father McGee was the popular and much loved parish priest in Goroka.

He was transferred to Madang about a month ago to fly the newly arrived Dornier aircraft and had been flying to Goroka each weekend to conduct services.

Father McGee was 36 years old and came from Debuque in Iowa, USA.

He was ordained as a missionary priest in 1951 at St Mary's Seminary Techney, Illinois.

Coming to New Guinea in 1954, Father McGee was stationed at Madang until 1959 when he transferred to Goroka.

Pupils under his care have increased from 60 to 300.

He is survived by his mother and five sisters.

One of his main interests was the promotion of education for the natives and during his stay in Goroka he was responsible for the building of four schools and had just commenced another.

TRIBUTES

Glowing tributes were paid to the late Father McGee from all sections of the community when St Mary's Church, Goroka, was filled to capacity for Monday's funeral service.

Bishop Schilling conducted the service and Reverend Father Wallachy read the scripture.

DCA officials who inspected the crash on Sunday said yesterday that an inquiry into the cause of the accident was being conducted and findings would be announced at a later date.

Defying the government authorities, the Faniufa boys found their way through the jungle and were the first to find the crash site and tend Father McGee's body. The sisters deeply felt

the loss of this friendly and prophetic priest who understood their heartfelt desire for mission among the New Guinea people and guided and supported them in their efforts.

The Goroka Convent of Mercy – a place of welcome

By this time, Sister Mary Elizabeth and the sisters had settled in and the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy was well known as a place of welcome for mission personnel for hospitality and retreats. The large boarding school provided accommodation on occasions for retreats for priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay missionaries within and beyond the diocese. Cathy (Gallagher) McMahon, former lay missionary in Lae and ex-pupil of the Melbourne Sisters of Mercy, recalled the welcome she received during school holidays at the oasis of the Goroka convent.⁹ The large boarding school also provided a home for out-of-town indigenous children attending Faniufa school. The garden tended by Sister Mary Julian was peaceful in its tropical beauty.



In the early sixties, the Sisters of Mercy from Goroka and Wewak arranged to have a combined retreat there. Although the different governance structures of the Union and the Federation were in operation, this did not stop the bond of Mercy sisterhood. Mother Elizabeth recalls that at a barbecue the older sisters were sitting on chairs, and the younger sisters were on mats further out on the grass. They could be heard saying: "We should all be one up here". In her heart Elizabeth fully agreed with this, but because the Mercy Sisters had been canonically organised as the Union and Federation, her loyalties prevented her from being part of the conversation! However, we do not know what these two foundresses, who were bonded by a mutual respect and deep concern for mercy mission, had to say on the subject in private!

Finances to carry on the schools were always being stretched, and managers of the commercial enterprises, including Mr Danny Leahy of Collins and Leahy, and Mrs Robinson of a town Bulk Trade Store, financially supported the sisters' work in education.

Money was short, even though the mission provided for some basic needs. In their spare time, the sisters sold second-hand clothes and newspapers to pay for the stipends of the lay missionaries. Money and school supplies were generously donated by the sisters and the school children in Australia, who were used to imaginative ways of fundraising in the days before the government supported Catholic schools. Extra money was now needed for the schools and to pay for the transport costs of the dilapidated jeeps, sorely tested on the narrow mountain tracks. But the stark fact was that as the schools expanded, the sisters occasionally did not have enough food or money to pay the household bills. At the Generalate, St Anne's in Canberra, Mother Patricia, in her circular letters to the congregations, appealed not only for more sisters for the mission work, but also for added financial support for the upkeep of the sisters themselves.¹⁰

The sisters continued the teaching and administration of St Mary's School (Primary A)¹¹ where student numbers remained in the twenties and the number of teachers decreased to two. The student numbers of the sisters' mission schools (Primary T Schools)¹² quickly rose to the hundreds. Occasionally, these differences were a source of tension, both for the sisters and the European community. The parishioners, as parents, understandably wanted the best for their children and the kind of Christian education that would allow them eventually to compete with students in Australian schools. They saw their children's needs in this light.

However, the general picture is of warm relationships. The parishioners were welcoming, kind and co-operative, and many of them maintained lasting friendships with the sisters. Yeroma, the wife of Jim Taylor, the early explorer, drove the sisters in her car in the days before they got their own transport. Through the influence of the prominent Goroka families, the Greatheads, Mullins, Taylors, Wells and Leahys, Christianity had a firm basis in the civic circles of the rapidly growing urban environment.

The first foundation at Goroka closes

There is no doubt that the sisters expended much of their time and energy into setting up and maintaining these pioneer schools in very difficult circumstances. Reconciling the ideals of the rather monastic type of community life, which was the canonical norm before Vatican II, with the growing mission demands, could not have been easy. Despite the idyllic climate of the 'eternal spring' of Goroka, illness befell some of the sisters, leading to their return to Australia. Among these were Sister Mary Irenaeus, who had been responsible for the building of the school and church at Tafeto. After she left, the lay missionary nurse, Audrey Stainsby, stayed in a small hut to continue her nursing care. The school was later taken over by a lay missionary, Jose Koch, and national teachers.

As Faniufa school expanded, Sister Mary Patrick was needed there, and the Religious Education at Yamiufa was left in the capable hands of lay missionaries, Cecily Evarding and Margaret Dahl. In 1964, Sister Algra suffered a serious road accident when the brakes of her old jeep failed on her way to Katagu, on the Bena road. During the months of her convalescence there was literally no one available and qualified to replace her. Her senior boys went to board

at Faniufa during the week to complete their upper primary years. The Katagu school was eventually taken over by the Lutheran Agency. Later that year, with dwindling student numbers, some pressure from the mission education authorities, and a growing desire for the sisters to reach out to the indigenous children in the Simbu, St Mary's European school was closed.

The educational work of the sisters continued in Goroka until the end of 1967 when their work was passed on to the Holy Spirit Sisters, lay missionaries and national teachers. The Bishop of Goroka, John Cohill, arranged for the new convent, which had been designed as a Mercy regional house, to be given to the Holy Spirit Sisters. The Mercy missionary focus was now to be the Simbu, although Sisters of Mercy would appear once again on the scene, particularly in the national institutes which were soon to blossom in Goroka.

In retrospect: a clash of cultures

In their early experiences, the pioneer sisters faced the 'cutting edge' from their Australian perspectives and the prevailing mentality. Following the western system of education and teaching the Australian curriculum of the colonial government, the sisters saw Christian education, literacy and numeracy as essential for the foundation of a free, democratic country. They were coming from the historical background of the 1930s economic depression, the subsequent rise of the Catholic population from the ranks of the working class through Catholic education, and the generally held belief in the power of Christian education to transform society.

Their approach would have implied a certain reliance on western ways, which to Melanesian people would have amounted to 'paternalism' and a disregard for their own cultural richness. Although the early sisters and those following them were far from insensitive to the clash of cultures, there were some hard lessons for them to learn of the consequences of the dislocations caused to the indigenous population.

The psychological consequences of access to formal education on the indigenous population were very hard – both to the parents and the children. As there were so few primary or secondary schools, the only means to get an education for the vast majority was to stay with *wantoks*¹³ near the school, or board in basic conditions at the school. Perhaps it was the minority of those of mixed racial descent who felt this dislocation and alienation most keenly when their families, supported by the sisters, sent them for schooling in Australia while still in their formative years.

Joys and sorrows mingled

There were splinters from the 'cutting edge' for the early sisters also as they experienced the cycle of joys and sorrows in their own lives. As they adapted to ever expanding possibilities, the sisters contended with illness, and some degree of misunderstanding in the face of different approaches taken to mission prior to Vatican II guidelines. Facing great disappointment, some of the early sisters were replaced, and re-appointed to Australia. In due course, three of the founding sisters returned to the people they had grown to love – Marie to the Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen, Algra to Pangia in the Mendi Diocese in the Southern Highlands¹⁴ (and later Holy Trinity Teachers College) and Irene to the satisfying challenge of secondary teaching of the girls at Mercy College Yarpas.

Endnotes

- ¹ This chapter has been researched from the archives of the Sisters of Mercy in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Sisters of Mercy PNG Region.
- ² Words ascribed to Mother Patricia have been reconstructed by the author after consideration of archival material, such as letters and reports.
- ³ Words ascribed to Archbishop Noser have been reconstructed by the author after consideration of archival material, such as letters and reports.
- ⁴ Words ascribed to Mother Elizabeth have been reconstructed by the author after due consideration of archival material such as letters and reports.
- ⁵ Words ascribed to Sister Marie Dagg have been reconstructed by the author after due consideration of archival material such as letters and reports.
- ⁶ Words ascribed to Father Harry McGee have been reconstructed by the author after due consideration of archival material such as letters and reports.
- ⁷ From archival records of the Goroka Diocese.
- ⁸ Printed in The Post Courier newspaper a few days after the funeral in St Mary's Catholic Church, Goroka.
- ⁹ Notes taken from an interview in Adelaide in August, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Circular cited in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Victoria Square, Western Australia.
- ¹¹ The schools where the Australian syllabus from Queensland was taught were referred to in this way.
- ¹² These were the schools for indigenous children in which a special syllabus for the Territory was used.
- ¹³ Tok Pisin term for relatives of family or clan.
- ¹⁴ Algra Clarke returned to PNG as a lay missionary sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, Victoria Square, Western Australia.
- ¹⁵ Taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.



GOROKA (1956-1967)

Founding Community

Elizabeth Miller (Superior), Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll, Julian (Algra) Clarke, Marie (Paul) Dagg.

Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll	Algra (Julian) Clarke
Margaret (Patrice) Clarke	Marie (Paul) Dagg
Valda (Padua) Finlay	Teresa (Matthew) Flaherty
Ursula (Marie Loreto) Gilbert	Mary (Antonita) Gleeson
Dorothy Anne (Emily) Harrick	Rita (Charles) Hassett
Coral (Felicitas) Hedley	M. Patrick Mahoney
Elizabeth Miller	St Roch Moore

Closing Community

Valda Finlay, M. Patrick Mahoney

Lay Missionaries – Australia

Mollie Bird, Margaret Dahl, Mary Jaier, Anne Lowndes,
Kathleen Miller, Lisa Pighetti, Carmel Tormey

Lay Missionaries – Europe

Cecily Everding, Jose Koch.

As a young assistant teacher at Faniufa, Maria Ika Aum¹⁵ expressed her desire to be a Sister of Mercy, and after novitiate formation with the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton, was accepted and professed as Sister Mary Damian (26/9/1967). Returning to PNG she did her teacher training at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen. Because of intense cultural pressures placed on her by her clan Maria was forced to leave the Sisters in 1971.



Maria Ika Aum – Sister Mary Damian.



ACROSS THE DAULO PASS TO THE SIMBU (1963-1990)



Gorge - Upper Simbu.

The call of the Simbu

The second place of Mercy ministry in the Highlands was Simbu, which means 'welcome'. The first foreigners in the area were greeted with the word 'Simbu' which they mistakenly thought was the name of the people. The area was discovered by Europeans in the 1930s and by Divine Word missionaries, approaching from Madang, who entered from the north near Mount Wilhelm and made their central mission station further south at Mingende. The steep, mountainous and populous region was later to become a separate province and diocese. Something of its natural beauty and mystery can be captured from the following description of the home place of Father Louis Ambane, who was to become a well-known and much loved priest.

To traverse the Simbu valley is to behold one of the specially beautiful places of this earth. The justly famed alpine regions of Europe do not outdo

Simbu where the highest peak, Mount Wilhelm, is the same height as the highest mountains of Europe. Picture yourself confined in the deep valley, your eyes always drawn upwards, first to the mountains and then to the startling blue of the sky that seems to soar ever upwards, even to heaven itself. Hear the rumble of the streams rushing down the sides of the valley and joining the river, see the people going to wash and refresh themselves in the clear waters. Admire the terraced gardens of the breathtakingly difficult terrain in Simbu on which the people have gardened for tens of centuries.

Picture yourself following any one of the foot tracks snaking along the ridges, leading up and up to an isolated house that stands like a security guard over the valley below. Imagine yourself coming to know every vista that appears as the highway winds its way up the valley through Ombondo-Koglai, Goglme, Womatne, all the way to Denglagu. And always the massive stone face of the valley broods above you, hiding death itself in the caves that dot its surface. Here the earth's spine is bare to see, not covered by snow as it is in Europe.

This is a land that demands toughness, it imposes hardship and, from time to time, hunger on its inhabitants, yet it has produced a rich culture in the life of the village, regulated by customary law, productive of respectful relationships, and capable of spiritual yearnings. At the same time, the culture of the people was

marred by frequent violence and by oppression of the weakest. It was a land ready for the message of the Prince of Peace preached by the missionaries.¹

Emerging needs in Simbu

On taking up his appointment to the Goroka Diocese in 1960, Bishop Bernard Schilling faced a serious pastoral problem – the needs of the densely populated Simbu area with a Catholic population of over 200,000 (or 90% of the Goroka Diocese). In their work of evangelisation, the Highlands priests had reached certain decisions about the use of language. The vernacular, known as *Tok Ples* was to be used with the aid of a catechist interpreter, as *Tok Pisin*² was not widely spoken by the ordinary village people at that time. *Tok Pisin* became the common language of teaching in the many schools which had been set up on the missions and outstations. However, in 1962, a new government policy prohibited the use of *Tok Pisin* in education and there was an urgent need for teachers of English throughout the country. This was particularly so in the Highlands, which, because of the later discovery, were considered to be generations behind the rest of the country in education and development.³

Father John Wald, who arrived with the first Divine Word missionaries in 1945, and was by this time widely experienced in education in Madang and the Highlands, saw a crisis looming in Simbu for want of sufficient teachers of English. In his role as Mission Education Secretary, he conveyed this concern to the priests, among whom was Father Jack Sheerin, then in charge of the central mission station at Mingende.

When the nearby mission station at Kup was suddenly deprived of pastor, Head Teacher and nurse almost overnight, the crisis prompted immediate action. In the Christmas period of 1963-1964, Father Jack Sheerin crossed the Daulo to make an urgent request for the Sisters of Mercy to come to the rescue. Their response triggered a Mercy movement that was to have a profound influence on education and health in the Simbu.

Father Jack Sheerin makes an urgent request for Sisters:

"I went across the Daulo from the central mission station of Mingende to Goroka. I wanted to see the Superior, Mother Patrick, personally, rather than try to explain things over the tele-radio.

The parish priest of Kup, Father Leo Joerger SVD, has had a breakdown in health, and Jerome Adams, the American lay missionary and Head Teacher of the school, has returned home. The nurse too has left for the States. There is absolutely no one to keep the station going or see to the education of the children and health of the people. I made an urgent plea for the Mercy Sisters at Goroka to come and manage the school and station until something could be worked out.



Mother Patrick assured me that the sisters were sympathetic to the needs of the Simbu as the priests have been regular visitors since the diocese was established in Goroka and have spoken of it often. In fact, all the sisters immediately agreed that they should do something to help in this emergency. As it is the Christmas vacation, Sister St Roch, the nurse, and Mother Patrick will go on over to keep things going until Elizabeth comes back from leave, and then she and St Roch will settle there.⁴

Mother Patrick Mahoney offers her response:



"I have made the following arrangements. Sister Marie Loreto (Ursula Gilbert) has agreed to leave Faniufa and go as Head Teacher and junior primary teacher of St Mary's school. One of the new recruits from Australia, Sister Matthew (Teresa Flaherty from Adelaide) will take Elizabeth's place, teaching the upper primary at St Mary's. Two others, Sister Padua (Valda Finlay) from Bathurst and Sister Mary Charles (Rita Hassett) from Singleton, will help the Head Teacher, Marie Dagg, Margaret Clarke and myself at Faniufa.

As well as the lay missionaries, Mary Jaier and Anne Lowndes, there is Maria Ika, a lovely young national woman from Lae who is brilliant with the young ones."⁵

Difficult beginnings at Kup

Thus, as the winds of Vatican II (1962-1965) began to flow throughout the Church, the Sisters of Mercy made the first of their moves to cross the Daulo Pass into Simbu. The sisters at Kup lived in dark and cramped circumstances, but in their enthusiasm, there were few complaints, and plenty of laughter. They lived in the vacated priests' house, and when Father Willie Bohlen replaced Father Joerger, they stayed on, providing his meals while he lived at the back of the mission trade store. Elizabeth held the school together with the national teachers, while Sister St Roch, a triple-certificated nurse, who had first turned her hand to teaching religion at Faniufa until there was a full time medical position for her, was at last able to dedicate herself to full-time nursing. Assisted by basically trained *dokta bois*,⁶ she managed the government bush material health centre a few hundred metres down the road. It was not an unusual sight to see her on the bike at night, lantern on the handle bars, hastening to meet an after hours' emergency.

Within two years of the sisters' arrival, tragedy struck. The cheerful, gentle, resourceful Sister St Roch, was diagnosed with cancer. There was great sadness among those who knew her in New Guinea, when news reached them of her death on April 1, 1965,⁷ just a few months after her return to Singleton. Sister Clement Mary (Winifred) Anderton from the Singleton Mater Hospital volunteered to replace her at Kup.

It was three years (1964-1967) before the convent was built. Brother Christopher SVD was the main builder but it could not have been done without lay helpers who were builders from the Singleton area. They came in answer to the request of Sister St Roch and her lay missionary nurse and friend, Dorothy Quade. Later, Father Quoite from Forbes organised a group of Catholic youth to come from Australia to build classrooms.

The convent burns down

The sisters' convent had been built by the diocese and was completed in 1967. Yet, hardly a year after being built, it burned down on June 12, 1968, due to the explosion of the kerosene fridge in the kitchen.

In her letter of gratitude to the sisters in Australia for their help afterwards, Sister Rita recalls the terrifying moments and the fear that the fire would spread and destroy the large bush church close by.

At 12:15 pm our native girl, Anna, who works in the kitchen, went to the small kerosene fridge to get some butter for the dinner vegetables... She said that as she opened the door black smoke and flames 'exploded' in her face. She screamed! Hearing the screams in the school rooms nearly twenty yards away, we left everything and ran. By the time we reached the convent it was impossible to go to the doors. Two native teachers broke windows in the rooms at either end of the building and climbed in. The fire was so fierce and rapid that one minute was all they had, and nothing practical could be rescued in that time. All we could do was stand and watch. After about 20 minutes, the whole convent had gone!

The church, a large grass building, was only 20 feet from the convent and all expected it to burn. We had the children remove everything from it, including the tabernacle. Hard, systematic work of the native teachers and the few people close by saved the church... We felt absolutely helpless, but the church was saved! We turned around and there was this small child anxiously holding the tabernacle and saying: 'Sister, what will I do with Jesus?'

Without any hesitation Father Willie Bohlen gave us his old house (which was our first home) and moved down to a grass roof dwelling (which we called the 'rat house') where he lived in very poor conditions for months and months, with no water or electricity.⁸

Australian volunteers to the rescue

It was through the generosity of Australians in financial and building help, that a new convent was soon able to be built. Grants were provided by the Australian Provinces and the Catholic Missions in Australia (Propagation of the Faith), but much fundraising was also done by the sisters' families and lay missionaries from Newcastle, Joan and John Montgomery, who had previously helped with the school buildings.

The personal cost of the fire

While the convent could be rebuilt, the ordeal itself was to have a devastating effect on Father Bohlen's young successor. While seeing to the building of the new church and convent, and carrying out pastoral duties during the day, Father Anton Mailander had only the privacy of a cramped school office space for his night's rest. The whole ordeal took a very serious toll on his health and he returned to his homeland for medical care. His illness and departure were sadly felt by the sisters and lay missionary, Monica Naylor, Sister Mary Elizabeth's sister, who were powerless to do any more than offer their help, trust and compassion.

Sister Mariska Kua's reminiscences of early days at Kup

Sister Mariska Kua, the first elected indigenous Leader of the Sisters of Mercy of PNG (2003-2007), reminisces on the early days at the Kup Mission station. Mariska's mother, Elizabeth, was the first female Church leader in Simbu and served for many years on the Board of Governors of Kondi, the first Catholic High School in Simbu.



I was taught by the Mercies and that's how I knew the Mercies. There were some people like Sister Elizabeth Miller, Clare Flinn, Rita Hassett, Mother Patrick, Sister St Roch, the nurse who died – a good number of sisters were there. There were a lot of activities round the station, they were the joyous moment of the people's life – the children went to school – a lot of children. It was something new and the people were enthusiastic about the new development, they were active in the parish, the people wanted to do something. Every child went to school – it was like the pride of their life and they were curious about new things happening.

The church would be full up and a lot of people would be participating in the liturgy, Christmas, Easter, feast days. There was something to do in the church and they would be preparing for months. It was like a social activity. We used to look forward to it and were fully involved. It brought joy and life into our life too. We were subsistence farmers, mostly in traditional clothes, but we were not poor. It was a time of hope. Civilisation was giving birth.

The station was half of my mother's land and half of another line's. Her father was the chief of the village and was very influential - he felt some kind of responsibility for what was going on at the station. My mother couldn't go there herself because she was the daughter of the chief – it was a status thing. My parents believed that education was important and they put us into school; even my grandfather knew the importance of education.

My uncle Endemongo was a very strong man who believed in the education system and the change that took place. When civilisation was taking place, they needed this type of man, born naturally a leader, who could look into the future and that people would respect... He would make sure all the children would go to school. He was the chief of the village, and when we were late he would be there watching us walking past, and he would make sure the students didn't run away. If there was a problem in the school, Endemongo would be there to negotiate and to sort things out, to make sure that the sisters were safe and sound and that the school was running smoothly. My uncle Endemongo was also a peacemaker in the society and the people had great respect for him.⁹

Spread of Mercy mission in Simbu

The sisters' prompt moving and settling in at Kup in 1963 gave the European priests in the rural areas of Simbu some indication of the willingness, adaptability and commitment to education and health of the rather unknown group of the Sisters of Mercy from Australia. In the interim years of Bishop Schilling's resignation and Bishop Cohill's appointment as Bishop of Goroka in 1966, the priests made many urgent requests for the sisters' help on their mission stations. Under the leadership of Mother Patrick first, then Mother Elizabeth, the sisters

responded enthusiastically, and with younger recruits from Australia, were able to make up the numbers, in twos and threes, until in time three more foundations were made in Simbu - Koge (1965), Goglme (1967) and Neragaima (1971). The last exodus from Goroka occurred when Sister Valda Finlay brought the final station-wagon load over the Daulo Pass, headed for Goglme in December 1967. The Sisters of Mercy were on four mission stations, radiating from the heart of Catholic mission activity at the SVD mission headquarters at Mingende. They worked according to the visions of the diocese, and were guided and encouraged by the Mission Education Secretaries, Father John Wald SVD and his successors, Fathers John Gilmore SVD and Ignatius Kilage.

The parish priests were the regular supporters of the new initiatives introduced by the sisters to the parents and pupils. Significant among these over the years were Fathers John Nilles, Jack Sheerin, Willie Bohlen, Henk te Maarssen, Edmund Kurten, John Lorse, William Kurtz, Ed Mussig, Louis (Skip) Welling, Franz Behler, Bernard Fisher, Clement Voss, Jim Knight, Olliver O'Connor and Jurgen Ommerborn.

Growing demand for education

As the colonial government had taken so little responsibility for education, the missions had assumed almost total responsibility for this. In the Simbu, the influence of the Catholic Church was prominent, and there were Lutheran, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist strongholds throughout the region, all with their own education structures. When the Catholic Church started schooling in Simbu, the language of instruction was *Kuman*, a common language for the Upper Simbu. This had been studied and taught by one of the pioneers of the Catholic Church, Father John Nilles. As schools proliferated with minimally trained catechist teachers, *Tok Pisin* was used. In time, English schools were started in the parishes. A selective system was followed for boys. The bright students who completed the three years of the *Tok Pisin* schools were chosen to enter Grade One at the central parish school. A second stage occurred when the most successful students were selected to proceed to middle and upper primary at a central boys' boarding school at Kondiu. After the first government school was opened at Kundiawa in the late 1950s, other government schools soon followed.

By the time the sisters arrived in Simbu, a clear direction for education had been set by the mission education authorities. They had decided to follow the American and Australian system of funding, managing and maintaining a complete Catholic primary system of education in which religious education was taught along with the secular subjects, and religious values were incorporated into the entire curriculum. This was chosen in preference to a practice found in some European countries: religious education and preparation for the sacraments occurred in junior primary Catholic schools and religious development was then followed up by qualified catechists in state-run upper primary schools. The complete Catholic primary school model adopted was manageable at first, but was soon in financial difficulties as education became more popular.

With the parents anxious to send their children to the schools, the system was being stretched beyond its limit. The lower primary grades were taught by "A" certificated indigenous teachers, qualified only to teach junior primary. The middle grades in the English Primary Schools were taught by the very few lay missionaries. Some schools were privileged to have specially trained

teacher-catechists (for example, Genevieve Bühler and Hildegard Weppner of Koge). Kondi could no longer assimilate the increasing number of boys. There was no provision made for the girls to continue beyond middle primary education. There were hardly any teachers qualified for the upper primary students, who were increasing year by year.

Furthermore, minimal government subsidies were only available to qualified overseas teachers, and the Church could not find adequate numbers of qualified staff for middle and upper primary classes, or the resources to provide salaries and housing for indigenous teachers.

The sisters step in

**Kup, 1963
Koge, 1965
Goglme, 1967
Neragaima, 1971**

The sisters soon found themselves in charge of the expanding parish schools at Kup, Koge, Goglme and Neragaima. As well as teaching the upper primary grades, they were responsible for the management of the school, the supervision and in-service of teachers, the co-ordination of religious education and, after hours, the upgrading of teachers through preparation, tuition and correction of secondary correspondence lessons.

In almost all cases, the first challenge was to raise the standard overall, including improving the daily attendance of the children! All this was essential for the schools to be granted official 'registration', entitling them to government subsidies and some school supplies.

One of the memorable tasks was the initial enrolment of the scores of youngsters anxiously accompanied by their parents. Perhaps there would be a little child with appealing brown eyes, propped up on his/her father's feet, hidden behind the official table, anxiously awaiting the verdict about enrolment! In the absence of birth or baptismal records, it was the custom at the time to estimate ages by the 'teeth' or 'arm over the head' method. The 'onset of second teeth' and the 'fingers reaching the ear' were considered signs of readiness for schooling. The results of the test categorised the child as 'too young', 'too old' or 'ready to start school'.

The mission stations were centres of parish-wide activities and it was not long before the sisters became involved in the wider concerns beyond their own school. They found that the main parish school served several different clans in the surrounding mountainous areas, and that youngsters had to cover long and difficult walking distances. School records showed that this proved impossible for the junior primary students, whose attendance rates would fall by the middle of the year, and they would repeatedly enrol again each following year. There were also Tok Pisin schools taught by the catechists and the more able students were selected to attend the main parish school. Inevitably, these were older boys who could manage the long distances. It became obvious that something needed to be done to reduce the dependence on the main parish school and provide equal opportunity for all youngsters of school age. The safety of the girls, in particular, was at risk in the hour-long walks over the mountains to school.

In the Koge Parish, junior schools were started at Tuli and Parua, while complete Catholic primary schools were set up at Giu and Nebare. The establishment of these schools, as well as two other government schools at Silma and Konema, was largely due to the initiative of the parish priest, Father Jack Sheerin, through negotiation with the government and people. Somewhat similar school situations were found at Goglme, where Catholic schools had been

established at Womatne, Barengigl, Gagnmambuno and Mai. These years were marked by a climate of close planning and collaboration – as well as some normal rivalry – between government and Church. These years were also the beginning of a long period when clan communities voluntarily provided the bush materials and labour for the many classrooms to start the schools. For some, these buildings were the first (and only) public signs of progress or government intervention in the area.

The preparation and selection of teachers for the Catholic schools and their in-service in the teaching subjects and Religious Education, was in the hands of the sisters. Sister Margaret Clarke, on her long mountain treks from Goglme to Mai to introduce the teachers to new methods in Religious Education, was a familiar sight to the people working in their gardens.

The sister nurses' healing hands - and mobile feet

While the teaching sisters were often together in twos or threes and worked in a somewhat familiar school system, the nursing sisters worked alone in setting up health facilities in rural areas to provide basic services at an aid post on the mission station. Sister St Roch in Kup was followed by Sisters Clement Mary (Winifred) Anderton (Kup, Koge, Goglme), Maria Goretti McCosker (Koge) and Rose (Margaret) Wilson (Goglme, Kundiawa). The nurse often shouldered the burdens of raising the standard of health care and prevention of illness, tending to difficult births and saving lives in danger. In most cases, sister nurses worked with indigenous assistants, who helped them with the language and customs, but who were minimally trained. The sister nurses' role in raising standards of these helpers was constant, and it was also often through their efforts to get additional funding for essential services that basic water tanks and hospital wards were erected. Extra medication resources from Mercy hospitals in the Goulburn, Singleton and Melbourne congregations supplemented limited government supplies.

The sister nurses worked, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, serving people in the entire area. Medicines were needed for the common illnesses of colds, flu, pneumonia, abscesses, ear and nasal infections, ulcers, skin diseases, accidental wounds and malaria. The incidence of serious wounds from domestic violence, and in times of tribal fighting, was high. They carried out the responsibility of diagnosis and treatment that a doctor would do in overseas hospitals, and there were anxious moments when there was no mission transport available trying to get patients quickly and safely to the government hospital at Kundiawa or the Catholic one, run by the Holy Spirit Sisters, at Mingende. Sometimes the village people would carry the sick person in a bamboo stretcher, but at other times, they would be unable or unwilling to do so, causing the nurse great disappointment and frustration! The sister nurses would visit the lepers who were ostracised from the village, to provide medical treatment.

Sister St Roch's pioneering nursing ministry

Mother Elizabeth offers an account of the ministry of the pioneer nurse, Sister St Roch:

Sister treated all kinds of ailments such as meningitis, cerebral malaria, nephritis, arrow wounds etc., but a great deal of her time was spent in the delivery room. To get some idea of the difficulties you must understand that there was no water at the hospital when sister went there. She found a sheet of roofing iron and got some boys to make a lean-to



so that it sloped down into a 44-gallon drum to catch the rain, and that was all she had to keep things, and patients, clean. Luckily rain was plentiful, so there was a fairly consistent amount in the drum. Usually the babies were born at night, and usually the mothers were only brought when the local midwives suspected complications. I often accompanied sister on these night expeditions. She was always calm, cheerful and compassionate. While she would be trying to give expert after-care to the mother, often the fathers in their relief and excitement would hug her around the legs!

At Kup we were very advanced with husbands and children, and sometimes a dog, in the room at the time of the birth. Sister could be firm, too, if the occasion arose. Once, about midnight, after we had tramped through mud in heavy rain to attend to a young mother, the mother, in her fear, sat up in bed and demanded that sister drive her to Kundiawa hospital, but sister just reminded her that we would all risk our lives if we tried to drive on our roads in that rain, and gently forced her to lie down again.¹⁰

Maternal and Child Health (MCH)

The sister nurses were responsible for Maternal and Child Health Care clinics (MCH) in the parish, and, in the case of Sister Rose (Margaret) Wilson, at Goglme and the neighbouring parishes of the upper Simbu district. She found that through the influence of the British nurses of the Save the Children Fund in the area, the people were more receptive to help in this way. It was a significant breakthrough as pregnant women began to use the mission health services for ante-natal care, labour and delivery and care of the new-born. The incidence of malnutrition was common, but more prevalent in isolated areas, where folklore and customary practices were detrimental to health and survival of mother and baby. With widespread illiteracy among the general population, the sister nurses relied on creating realistic charts to illustrate measures in spoons for doses of medicine and recommended diets of local foods and vegetables for very young children. Transport for MCH clinics was uncertain, as Rose attempted to synchronise her program with that of the parish priest's pastoral rounds. On more than one occasion, she found herself walking the winding path back to the main station after a day's work weighing and treating babies and pregnant mothers.

Nationalisation of health – the sister nurses leave the mission stations

With impending localisation of health services, the facilities at Kup were returned to complete government control, and those at Koge were replaced by the government district health centre at Muaina, nearer Koge village. In the report of her visit to the sisters in 1973, the Union Leader, Sister Maria Joseph Carr, referred to the Government Health Plan, recognising the role of the Catholic health sub-centre at Goglme in preparation for independence.

The House of Assembly aims at producing a comprehensive National Health Plan by October. As part of this plan indigenous nurses are being trained at Goglme. Sister Mary Rose (Margaret Wilson) supervises three nurse-aides and one mothercraft nurse trainee; she is responsible also for seven village patrols and five school pa-

trols. At Goglme itself she looks after the 'haus sik' with fifteen beds, a small delivery room and a registered aid post. Soon, we are told that only those nurses with special qualifications will be allowed to enter the country and work as paid personnel. Future development is uncertain in nursing as for those teaching in primary schools.¹¹

Responding to new needs in health - the training of nurses

When the sub-health centre at Goglme was localised, Sister Rose gained a position first in nursing at the Kundiawa Hospital, then in supervising MCH work throughout the Simbu Province. Her comments shed light on how some Goglme patients helped her to make the transition from the mission to a government establishment.

It was an interesting transition from Goglme to Kundiawa – some of the patients would know me and they'd call me Sista bilong Goglme, so I had an identity... So I carried the Goglme identity with me, and I suppose part of the missionary respect.¹²

Rose's rural mission and provincial government experiences had shown her the need for good health education in the training of nurses, and at the end of the year, she left for Australia to complete a degree in Nurse Education. On her return, she began her new ministry with the training of nurses at the Mount Hagen School of Nursing.

The hub of the mission stations

The teachers and nurses worked closely with the SVD priests and brothers and were guided by their experience and mission practice. Inevitably, the household management and hospitality for the mission station fell to the sisters, who, busy about their school and hospital duties, relied on young untrained cook girls for the domestic chores. The sisters became involved in the life of the parish, accompanying the priests to the many bush outstation churches for baptisms and Sunday Mass. They were filled with wonder at the crowds of people at the village markets, the throngs bringing anxious children on school enrolment day, patients seeking medication at the *haus sik*,¹³ the parishioners filling the main station churches for liturgy on Sundays and the whole congregation raising their voices in Simbu hymns of worship. The sisters were profoundly moved by the power of the people to put themselves into the scripture being enacted in the liturgy, their faith finding expression through their inherent talent for drama and story-telling. Another source of wonder was the clan cohesion, exuberance, vitality and prosperity seen in *singsings*¹⁴ and the seven-year ceremonial pig-killing feasts. On special occasions of reconciliation, there were the rare evening celebrations of the Eucharist in the village, followed by the *mumu*¹⁵ – the people expressing their unity in Christ, among themselves, and with their ancestors, in their typically reverent, respectful cultural ways.

The sisters were joined in their mission work, as they had been in Goroka, by former Mercy students, friends and family. Jan Birmingham from Mount Gambier, spent two years teaching at Koge, and ventured out to the remote station at Wangoi near Mount Elimbari, as the first Head Teacher of the new school, whose middle primary students had previously been boarders at Koge. Anne Flaherty (teacher) and Tricia Bubb (financial manager) spent some time at Koge, where their sisters, Tess and Margaret, were stationed. Marie Nicholas, niece of Sister Carmel Burke¹⁶ who was a close friend of Elizabeth Miller, taught at Kup.

Verbal communication with the people was difficult. The main language of the Upper Simbu, the place of origin of the Simbu clans, was *Kuman*, and a dictionary of this language had been compiled by Father John Nilles SVD. Unique and valuable though this was, it did not cover the wide variations of the numerous dialects encountered in the different mission areas. The sisters' attempts to learn basic language sentences were thwarted as their efforts were dismissed and variously corrected by their competent pupils! The use of *Tok Pisin* was gradually spreading from the Coast to the Highlands, and this became the sisters' means of communication with parents. The indigenous teachers living on the station were on hand to interpret intricacies as they occurred. Some sisters became quite proficient in communication, but in general, the sisters tended to put their priorities into the demanding day-to-day tasks.

Daily life on the mission station had its normal share of ups and downs, but there was plenty of vitality, inspiration and exchange. There were the station personnel comprising the national staff, their wives and small children, the young and energetic lay missionaries working as teachers, builders and carpenters, and the enthusiastic SVD seminarians, Paul Beirne and John Reedy. There were also the occasional friendly visitors from neighbouring government and mission stations. There was excitement when the plane landed every couple of weeks and the priest pilot and his small Cessna, carrying mail and supplies, provided real and symbolic links with the outside world.

The networks of small road tracks often revealing the half-metre of arable topsoil above the red clay in this densely populated district were already being threaded together to meet with the arterial Highlands Highway, and close the 'time distance' between the various mission stations. After the fatal mission plane crash in 1965, in which three Divine Word priests, including the pilot, Father Wallachy, were killed, mission flying in the Simbu virtually ceased, and road transport took over. The sisters relied on the priests for transport until the 1970s when four-wheel drive vehicles were needed for supervision of the schools in the local area.



Time Together at Kup.

Although outings from the mission stations were rare, the sisters got together for retreats and holidays. Kup replaced Goroka as the Mercy centre and the younger sisters were happily accommodated together in the appropriately named 'rat house'. The sisters' house at Koge, which had been extended to provide a common dining room for mission personnel, and the new convent buildings at Goglme and Neragaima, also served as gathering places. Later,

with the increased number of sisters, Mingende and Kondiu became regular meeting places because of the more central facilities available.

These occasions were important not only for relaxation and morale (leaving aside the navigation of the dangerous roads and landslides in the wet season!), but also for teasing out the Mercy identity as missionary Sisters of Mercy as they faced the tensions of a changing Church and society as 'guests' in the country.

The groundswell of Independence

The years prior to independence were exciting, challenging and filled with uncertainty. The first big change in education came after the passing by the House of Assembly of the Education Act (1970) and the Teaching Service Act (1971) when the National Teaching Service, combining the various education agencies of Church and government, was formed in 1971. The mainline Churches that had been the backbone of educational services, including primary teacher education, continued their prominent role. Their teachers now had rights to equal salary and promotional opportunities. However, they were behind their government counterparts in the race for qualifications and experience required at management level. Achieving an inspection report recommending 'eligibility for promotion' became an abiding incentive for mission teachers, particularly those with leadership prospects!

The sisters had been working at raising the education bar for their schools. There was tremendous joy in seeing their teachers, and in time, their former students, take on new positions of responsibility. On the other hand, there were painful pangs of disappointment as an imposed selective system meant that, on the completion of primary education, a minority of successful students only could gain entry to secondary or technical education, or opportunities to receive technical training or unskilled employment. Through national curriculum policies of cultural studies and agriculture in the primary schools, the newly established National Department of Education attempted a more integrated approach to incorporate ex-students into their village life. The sisters vigorously pursued this initiative, but these measures could not stem the tide of the majority of students seeking an elusive livelihood in the towns. Disillusioned in their teenage years, and seen as 'drop-outs' or failures within their clan communities, many joined the nationwide trend of flocking to the towns to stay with wantoks or seek work – the social phenomenon referred to as the 'urban drift'.

Facing some tough questions

The government's imperative of localisation of primary education for 1973, announced in 1971, galvanised many expatriates to face future realities. Although there was some climate of fear among the missionaries as independence approached – a fear fanned by accounts of the bloodshed accompanying independence in the Congo – the sisters chose to remain in the Simbu. They would face the future, some to complete their localisation task in primary education, and others to meet the changing needs of a growing local Church.

The sisters attempt to 'read the signs of the times'

Excerpts of Sister Mary Elizabeth's hastily hand-written letter to the Union leader, Mother Marie Therese in Canberra indicate some initiatives being considered among the sisters.

Dear Mother,

The Director of Education is accelerating the programme of getting all primary schools run by New Guineans. We must prepare for this so that we can be ready to step into other works - but sisters would have to be trained if it is to be catechetics or social works. I have written to the Bishop and his Senate and asked them where they think we could be most useful. We have thought of - being on staff at Kondiu Co-educational High school, or Kerowagi High school or Goroka Teachers College - conducting vocational school for girls (cooking, sewing etc for girls who miss out on High School) - in charge of Catechist School or Leadership Courses, Area supervisors of schools or curriculum advisors. Sisters in the High schools would get salaries too.

The [Government] Health Centre to be set up at Muaina near Koge needs a nurse for Mothercraft and Child Health Care, and they are offering it to Sister Clement Mary... It would be a secure position for her, whereas the Admin might not help with medical supplies or subsidy if she wanted to keep the Aid Post at Koge.

If something of this sort comes about our community structure would be changed. We envisage sisters holding posts in various areas and we think we would be better off with one Superior instead of one in each house [Kup, Koge, Goglme and Neragaima] as some of the sisters will be moving around. It would be better if each Sister was given a living allowance like the lay missionaries, and be responsible for their own clothing, doctor's bills, etc.

Then comes the question of Sister Teresa's salary. It will be about \$5000 per annum. At present sister gets a cheque for \$140 or thereabouts every fortnight. The original arrangement was that the sisters' salaries went to the Station that was supporting her, but we consider that the Station should get the amount we earned before.

We would like a fund set up so that the sisters on the mission could feel free to sometimes travel to other parts of the Territory if it would be in the interest of her work, or to do courses or for the orientation courses and suchlike.

I have scribbled it down in a hurry now as Father will be able to post it tomorrow and it is late and I haven't had time to think connectedly, but at least it will give you some idea of the changes we see coming in the not too distant future.

I would be glad if you could consider what changes would be acceptable. I know it will mean a lot of responsibility being put on the individual sister, but I feel we could better serve our people in this way than by keeping all in one place - or a few places - and it looks as if something of this kind will come about.

S M Elizabeth⁷

Support of the Diocese

The sisters were heartened in their desire to consider wider perspectives of ministry by Bishop John Cohill, who had been appointed Bishop of Goroka on November 15, 1966. They were guided by a new diocesan policy, largely advocated by Father Leo Joerger (who had recuperated from his illness at Kup several years earlier and resumed pastoral duties). The new focus was on the diocesan-wide needs of secondary education, vocational education, and ministries with catechists and teachers. Concern for the ex-students of Catholic schools influenced the sisters to become involved in secondary school teaching and teacher education.

Moving on – supporting localisation of primary education

As the national teachers made their first tentative steps in educational management, the sisters found ways to support them. Recommended by Sister Mary Elizabeth and Bishop Cohill, Sister Teresa Flaherty joined the Public Service in 1971 to carry out advisory and inspection visits to the many far-flung schools in Simbu, assisting the Catholic and other mission agency teachers to become an integral part of the new 'unified' system with their 'administration' counterparts. In 1973, appointed by the Bishop, and with Mingende as a base, Sister Rita Hassett commenced renewal work with catechists, and branched out to take on the demanding task of management of Catholic education in the diocese, with the official role of Secretary for Catholic Education. The whole diocese was saddened by the sudden accidental death of Bruno Wena whom she had trained to take over as Secretary. Rita later trained Mrs Maria Kumo to take over this position at Goroka, a position she was to hold for many years. Rita was joined at Mingende in 1978 by Sister Margaret Bubb, who carried out the specialist ministry as Co-ordinator of Religious Education in Catholic Schools.

Parish initiatives of pastoral ministry and rural vocational education

Unsettling signs of the dislocation of formal education from traditional life had prompted some sisters to leave the system, even before the government localisation initiative. Sister Margaret Bubb (1972) and Sister RoseMary Baker (1973) introduced significant alternatives to formal education in the form of rural vocational education and pastoral work with adults at Koge. They were encouraged by the parish priest, Father Jim Knight, SVD.

The Union Leader, Sister Maria Joseph Carr explains in a report written after her 1973 visit to the sisters, how Margaret with Frank Yur, was managing a Rural Vocational Centre for 26 young village men and 36 women, and how RoseMary was engaged in the first pastoral ministry with women in Simbu. Carrying her spade, RoseMary walked to the villages, working side-by-side with women in their food gardens, conversing with them and engaging in faith dialogue with them, as the moment arose.

Margaret was Manager of the Rural Vocational Centre at Koge. The boys I saw were in their first year of training and were very proud of their pigs and chickens; they work their rented plot of a quarter of an acre at the Centre now; in their second year they will be supervised in their villages. The girls' courses include traditional and market gardening, sewing, crafts, skills to improve health, hygiene and nutrition, child care and home management. They learn to bake bread in an outdoor oven as well as modern types.

The Centre aims at training young people in skills for work, not away from, but in, their villages, where they may contribute to the religious, social and economic development of their own people. The trainees themselves, with help from their parents, constructed the buildings necessary for their Centre and they find real satisfaction in their achievements and in their socials, too.

RoseMary did a course in Catechetics at Maiwara in preparation for this new work. Having tried unsuccessfully to get the women in the area to come to her, RoseMary went out to the people on foot, wet or dry, carrying her little spade, collecting a few women for instructions and then going with them to their gardens. She established such good relationships that she did

more in that way than in formal lessons.¹⁸

The Rural Vocational Centre at Koge continued with considerable success. When Margaret later returned to Australia because of sickness, Sister Clare Flinn took over the management. Eventually the Centre was forced to close due to constant stealing of the local produce of chickens and fish. Clare taught for a short time at Muaina High school, so that RoseMary's ministry in village pastoral work with women could continue.

Searching for a new 'Mercy way' forward

In developing their Mercy mission identity in the light of Vatican II theology, the sisters were influenced and inspired by the Divine Word priests of the Simbu and Goroka areas of the diocese, including those of the emerging Melanesian and Liturgical Catechetical Institutes. Xavier Institute in Port Moresby was also a powerful pivot of contemporary mission theology. Changes in ministry did not proceed smoothly, and there was a degree of tension and uncertainty in mission circles. Sisters faced difficult questions about the financial situation, such as whether to be dependent on, or independent of the mission, the essence of mission and community in changing times, applying the new teachings on religious life, working for inculturation and confronting superficial western influences. In addition, other matters, such as the practicalities of mission living, possibilities for future ministry and modifying religious dress and customs, were all points of discussion and debate. Needless to say, there were no simple and very few unanimous solutions. Differences of opinion were common enough, but the sisters pressed on, attempting to discern as a united group, encouraging and enabling each other's response to emerging needs, and grappling with the realities of every day. During this time of change, the Union Leaders were Elizabeth Miller (1968-1973), Teresa Flaherty (1974-1976), and Rita Hassett (1977-1980).

In order to articulate their Mercy mission, the sisters gathered together whenever possible (which in hindsight seemed rather frequent in those days of adaptation to constant change). An example of these attempts may be seen in a document the sisters prepared together entitled 'The mission of our community'. The introduction only is given here to indicate something of the common understanding that helped forge the unity and common purpose of the sisters.

As missionaries we are commissioned to help build up the Christian community and shape it into a symbol of God's presence in the world (Ad Gentes, 15).¹⁹ Under the direction of the Bishop, we willingly accept this commission and all the responsibilities for working towards this in co-operation with fellow missionaries and the local Church.

As Sisters of Mercy in a developing country we feel the one challenge urging and uniting us: to bring 'Mercy' to those we work with by helping them to come closer to personal fulfilment - to increase their sense of responsibility, of human dignity and pride. We strive to help them to equip themselves to control their own destinies. This 'localisation' is the greatest service of mercy we can offer. We meet this call in many ways - in families, in civic groups, in social, educational and medical services.²⁰

The Australian leaders' level of trust

The complexities of changing community and ministry were not easy for the sisters to articulate on the ground, or for the Australian Union leaders to comprehend from afar. The emerging situations seemed to take sisters away from conventual community life as they attempted to retain close Mercy bonds, while finding new forms of living and working with those of other religious congregations, denominations or faiths. Many were the sisters' gatherings as they attempted to discern these new directions and put them into the written word. The Australian Union Leaders, Sister Mary Therese Moore (1966-1971) from Bathurst, and Sister Maria Joseph Carr (1972-1977) from Singleton, in Canberra, were very concerned for the sisters on mission, and for the integrity and renewal of religious life. They were solicitous and generous in their pastoral care and there was much soul-searching in their attempts, both to guide and to accompany the sisters. Although they were witnessing trends of the opening up of religious to wider social needs, which were only later to burst upon the Australian and worldwide scene, this development was not recognised at the time. Despite some initial caution, the Union leaders did much to publicise the needs of the mission and to attract more volunteers from Australia.

Travel on Simbu roads

Finding one's way through the mountain regions of Simbu, whether it be on the main roads or the narrow connecting tracks, could be precarious and unreliable, and often in the wet season, impossible. This was the case for the experienced drivers and the mature-age learners! There were some serious accidents suffered by missionaries – priests, sisters and lay missionaries. There was the perennial fear of inadvertently running over a pig – not only in terms of the unknown financial consequences of compensation, but of facing instant threat to one's life.

Sometimes sisters would be away for the week, returning to their base on the weekend. In their travels, it was not unusual for one of the sisters to be stranded at some village or government or mission station – or heartily welcomed by Brother Joseph to a cup of hot coffee and biscuits at the mission centre at Mingende!

Kerowagi Provincial High School

From 1972 to 1975, Sister Noreen Collins (previously of Kup and Neragaina) was appointed to the academic staff of the government high school at Kerowagi, with pastoral duties to the Catholic students and particular care of the young women students. Noreen was the first of the sisters to live on the campus of a government institution. In 1981, Sister Julie Rees was appointed there, before moving to Aiyura National High School.

The Simbu sisters' diaspora

Adapting to new circumstances would lead to something like a diaspora as the sisters left the security of each of the four mission stations and branched out to meet new areas of need.

Year	Sisters of Mercy	Area of Work
1970	Teresa Flaherty	Inspector of Simbu Schools
1972	Noreen Collins	Kerowagi High School
1972	Margaret Bubb	Koge Vocational School
1973	Rose (Margaret) Wilson	Hospital Nursing and MCH Supervisor at Provincial Department of Health, Kundiawa
1973	Rita Hassett	Catechetics and Catholic Education Secretary for the Goroka Diocese at Mingende
1974	RoseMary Baker	Village Pastoral Work with Women Church Leaders
1974	Clare Flinn	Koge Vocational Centre
1974	Valda Finlay	Kondiu High School
1974	Teresa Flaherty	Goroka Teachers College
1975	Rose (Margaret) Wilson	Tutor of Nurse Education with the Provincial Department of Health, Mount Hagen
1975	Clare Flinn	Muaina High School, living at Koge.
1977	RoseMary Baker	Training Program for two Sisters of St Therese in Village Pastoral Catechetics, Karkar Island, Madang

Leaving the first four convents

In meeting the emerging needs, the small band of sisters was stretched beyond the possibility of maintaining their community presence on the mission stations. The convents of Kup, Goglme and Neragaima closed in 1973, and that of Koge, towards the end of 1975. In these circumstances, partings for all concerned were painful. Shortly after independence in 1975, the sisters' homes of permanent materials that had been extended and maintained, once again became the dwelling places of the priests, who had, in almost every case, handed them over to the sisters on their arrival while they themselves sought temporary shelter in houses made of bush materials.

The convent building of Kup has stood the test of time, and its latest use has been as a centre: Kup Women's Centre for Peace,²¹ an organisation which stands against corruption, violence and tribal fighting in the area. This is a fitting 'crossing' of the sisters' first place of residence in the Simbu.

Kondiu High School and the secondary education of girls

In the early 1970s, a request was made to the Union Sisters of Mercy for volunteers to enable Simbu girls to enter secondary education in the Catholic system at Kondiu High School. This was a new initiative, as girls had not been considered for secondary education before this time. The two sisters who responded to this request in 1974, particularly to take care of the girls, were Valda Finlay, who moved from Goglme Primary School, and Elizabeth Devine from Perth, who had spent her first year at Neragaima Primary school to help her get in touch with the culture and the situation from which students would proceed to Kondiu. This work, in collaboration with the De La Salle Brothers, and under the successive administration terms of Brothers Columban, Peter Mays and Ed Becker, was to continue in the diocese for 26 years.

Sister Elizabeth Devine recalls her experience:

Localisation was actually a call from the government at the time, and the mission of the Sisters of Mercy was to empower and support indigenous teachers in new roles of leadership. From September to December, when the Head Teacher, Sister Coral Hedley, went to EAPI (East Asian Pastoral Ministry) in the Philippines, I worked under the first local Head Teacher at Neragaima.

In 1974, Valda and I moved to Kondiu High School, with the first 40 young secondary female students. The residential dormitory was incomplete and each night we would walk about a mile down to the farm to sleep to take care of the girls. On a personal level, I felt energised by the empowerment of young women and their liberation into a more just and equal society.

At Kondiu, I did not actually teach the girls. I was put to teach Year 4 boys who took some time in accepting knowledge (being told anything) by a woman. Ultimately, they rationalised, that because I was a nun, I wasn't quite a woman, and they accepted me as a teacher! From teaching the boys, I learnt more about the culture and feelings of the local people than I could ever have learnt in years of study.²²

Localisation of secondary education

It was not long before the sisters found themselves in a familiar 'localisation' situation – this time with the task of supervising and training national teachers for senior management positions in secondary education. Among the many teachers who progressed to higher levels of administration were Sister Solange Arua OLSH, and Mr Peter Miria, later to serve as National Secretary for Education for many years.

Peter Mays, the longest serving principal, reminisced that there were difficulties connected with the rapid expansion and development of secondary education. To illustrate this he recalled an incident involving Sister Elizabeth Miller, who was by then quite elderly and a highly respected person in the Simbu district, having served on different mission stations and held the post of librarian at Kondiu.

The staff had been engaged in a tiring afternoon meeting during which different ones expressed their contrary views rather strongly. Just before the tea break, a

calm, white-haired lady in the corner made a quiet interjection. She pointed out that it was obvious that each one, from the oldest to the youngest, had the interests of Rosary High School at heart, and it would be good for everyone to keep that in mind, as they tried to reach a solution. The staff thoughtfully pondered her words, and after the tea break, the meeting resumed with noticeably more trust and confidence.²³

A cultural lesson in reconciliation

A letter recorded by Sister Mary Stallard, the last Sister of Mercy at Kondiu, shows how powerful traditional practices of reconciliation were used to solve tribal factions in the school setting – inter-school sports! The offending parties were the Kondiu and Muaina High School students and the venue for reconciliation was near the Assembly Hall at Muaina High School, where government and education dignitaries of the province and the two headmasters had gathered. The account that follows was written by Peter Kambu Aimes, the Secretary of the Student Representative Council.

After the introduction of people, the Kiap (Patrol Officer) of Kamtai District asked the spokesman of Kondiu to go up to the stage and get the sugar cane. The Muaina spokesman did the same – both were School Presidents. Then the Kiap asked the two to recall what had happened the previous Friday at the Jackson field at Kundiawa while the game was in motion. Our brave School President gave a meaningful speech about what had happened and people in the Education Department were smiling and clapping their hands. Then the Muaina School President spoke to everyone.

After their speeches, the Kiap called upon the Headmaster of Kondiu and Muaina to come forward. A big [important] man from Kondiu (Parents' Representative Council) went forward then and from their side a big man from Muaina (Parents' Representative Council) came forward. We had four people on the stage. He then called the two Presidents to carry their sugar cane and come forward. They held both pieces of sugar and came across the stage. The Kiap stood in the centre, putting Kondiu Headmaster, President and Parents' Representative on his left and Muaina Headmaster, President and Parents' Representative on his right. He stood at the centre and broke the sugar cane in halves. Some students grabbed each other and cried. It was a peaceful ceremony and two became one. After the brukim suga ceremony²⁴ was over, the Muaina students supplied us with a special dinner. We all shared food with the staff of Muaina and Kondiu. Some girls shared their food with the Muaina students and so did the boys. We all mixed together and shared food.

After the dinner, we left sadly leaving our brothers and sisters behind. They were very sad too. They came to the gate and shook their hands with us and waved their hands as we came away.²⁵

The sisters leave Kondiu - and the Simbu

Sisters of Mercy were on the staff at Kondiu for 26 years. The pioneer sisters were replaced by Sister Clare Flinn from Koge and new recruits from Australia, Sisters Mary Eamon Brennan, Mavis McBride, Carmel Carroll and others. In all, twelve Sisters of Mercy served at Kondiu, and in the final years, the Australian sisters were joined by one of the first PNG sisters to cross from the Coast to the Highlands, Sister Angeline Singiat. Sister Mary Stallard, who had crossed from Yarapos, was the last Sister of Mercy at Kondiu. During her final year in 1990 she lived with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Les Soeurs de Sacré Coeur de Jésus), who, under

the leadership of Sister Ghislaine Marion SSCJ, replaced the Sisters of Mercy at Kondiu. Other Sisters of the Sacred Heart to serve at Kondiu were Sisters Cynthia Koliba, Denise Samson and Laura Reitsma²⁶.

The final years of an era of the Sisters of Mercy in Simbu (1963-1990)

By the 1980s, the numbers of the Sisters of Mercy in Simbu were dwindling. For some time, based at Mingende, Sister Rita Hassett carried out work with teachers as Catholic Education Secretary, and Sister Margaret Bubb visited the schools as Religious Education Co-ordinator. Road travel was very difficult, and grew increasingly more dangerous, particularly with the eruption of violence during times of tribal warfare or the disruptions of the post-election clan rivalries.

Reflections on Simbu crossings in ministry

For some sisters, the moves taken during this era heralded the beginning of several changes in ministry and place as they moved up or down the 'ladder' of responsibility. Sister Rita Hassett was involved in education and catechetics (Simbu), marriage enrichment (Enga), and seminary training (Madang). Sister Margaret Wilson moved from nursing and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) work (Simbu) to nurse education (Mount Hagen, Aitape and Lemakot, New Ireland). Sister Valda Finlay moved from primary (Goglime) to secondary teaching (Kondiu High School), and then to teacher education (Holy Trinity Teachers College). Sister RoseMary Baker carried out pastoral work in Simbu, later working with women in Madang, Enga and Wewak. Sister Clare Flinn taught at Rosary High School, Kondiu for several years, and later moved to the Government High School at Mount Wilhelm (1987-1989) to care for the female students and be a pastoral presence for the predominantly Catholic body of staff and students. Sister Julie Rees moved from the Provincial Government High School at Kerowagi to teach at the Aiyura National High School on the Goroka side of the range.

The sisters undertook further study to acquire the qualifications needed for these new ministries. Education and religious education was completed via distance education, while catechetics and pastoral ministries were undertaken at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippines, nursing education in Australia, and pastoral ministry (as applied to PNG) at a special nationwide course at Maiwara in Madang.

Sisters appointed to these positions were engaged in Church or government short-term contracts subject to special conditions for renewal considered at times of 'inspection'. Among the special conditions for renewal was evidence of the sister's training and active promotion of national staff. When contract renewal was being considered, and a national candidate was rated by authorities as 'suitable' for the position, the sister's contract would not be renewed. This active promotion of localisation was also a strictly enforced immigration requirement for renewal of visas to enter and work in PNG. In general, the sisters, in keeping with their ideal of the vow of poverty, accepted salary, which they shared communally, on a par with national staff. The sisters' appointments and applications for contract renewal were considered and decided upon by the Union Leader until the Sisters of Mercy in PNG united together in 1981. After 1981, this role was assumed by the national leader of the Sisters of Mercy PNG.

Support of the Bishops of Goroka and Simbu

The sisters' moves were carried out with the authorisation of the diocesan bishops. On October 25, 1978, the Bishop of Goroka, John Cohill, ordained Father Raymond Caesar SVD as Coadjutor Bishop of Goroka. Bishop Caesar took up residence in Simbu. On the resignation of Bishop Cohill, Raymond Caesar became Bishop of Goroka, including Simbu (September 10, 1980). In 1982, the Vatican rearranged dioceses to coincide with government provincial boundaries and William Kurtz SVD was appointed Bishop of Kundiawa in the Province of Simbu. When he later became the Archbishop of Madang, Father Henk te Maarsen SVD, who as parish priest, had first invited the sisters to Goglime, succeeded him as Bishop of Kundiawa.

Called back to Simbu – Neragaima Health Sub-Centre

In 1980, Sister Joan Adams responded from Singleton to a request from Bishop Raymond Caesar for assistance to manage a new health sub-centre at Neragaima on the understanding that building finances would be provided by the diocese. Joan, as officer in charge, planned the building with the builder, Brother Hermann Gemms SVD. She conducted general nursing clinics and carried out Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinics throughout the parish, assisted by her lay missionary friend, Paulo Reid. She procured money from Australia for water tanks, hospital furnishings and a hospital vehicle. In 1984, a fine building, consisting of two general wards, separate wards for men and women, a maternity ward, storeroom and office, was completed. For a short time, Elizabeth Miller was Joan's companion in community. Two other sisters, Marie Dagg and Therese Quinlivan from Aitape, served temporarily at Neragaima. After Joan's departure, the Sacred Heart Sisters continued in the nursing ministry at Neragaima.

Called a third time - national sisters to Neragaima (1999–2002)

In 1999, a request was made for the sisters to return to Neragaima. A community of national sisters replaced the expatriate community of former times. This was a significant step, reflecting the localisation of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG. The first community comprised Sisters Sophie Samiak (nurse), Maryanne Kolkia (teacher) and Margaret Roni (nurse). In 2000, Sister Claudia Apalenda (nurse) and Theresia Tina (teacher) joined Maryanne to form the second community. In 2002, the community was reduced to two (Maryanne and Theresia) when Claudia was transferred to Callan Services in Wewak. However, the situation, which started out with promise, was not conducive to effective ministry, as tribal fighting divided the local communities and the sick were not brought to the health centre; nor was it safe for the nurses to travel to the outstations. These law and order problems escalated throughout the province during the election process of 2002. Sister Theresia Tina's report explains the danger and the inability of civil authorities to bring about justice and peace.

The national elections of the year 2002 - a time of blood shedding and weeping and mourning. Fires blazed out everywhere burning down houses of various shapes, sizes, and colours and of course the red and yellow flames of the man-created fires swallowed all of God's creation. All this happened around June and July. In the ninth month, a few children came to school but teachers were absent because they were scared that their enemies would attack them. Normal classes were carried out in the tenth month with still only a small number of students and staff in most schools in the Highlands provinces.

Then the eleventh month came around and it was the very first day of November that the unexpected holiday for the sisters of Neragaima popped up from the beautiful mountains of Simbu. It was a fine day on the first day of November when I drove to Kundiawa in our little green Suzuki to collect the Grade Eight examination papers and to do our house business. All was done successfully in town. I was driving home at three o'clock to a place called Kumunul when four men with home made guns came out on my way and I could not move any further. One of the men came to my side, pointed his gun at me while the others got in and collected all they wanted from the car. I was numb and didn't know what to do. After collecting everything, they let me go with only a few *kaukaw*²⁷ on the floor of the car.

I drove up the mountain as fast as I could in search of help but all the houses were burnt down so people were no longer living along the roadsides. They moved in to the bushes to protect themselves from the enemies. As I was going up a mountain called Calvary another lot of armed men came out of the bushes. This time I was ordered to come out of the car and thought they were going to take away my life without God's permission. Now I prayed, "God my life is in your hands", again they went in and collected the left over *kaukau* and disappeared into the bushes.

We (Sister Maryanne and I) reported the matter to the police. Unfortunately, we couldn't go any further although we spent many good weeks going and coming to and from the police station.

Thank you all for your prayers, support and concern. All is appreciated and treasured by us the ex-Neragaimas. Thank you and God bless you all as we journey on.

Your sister in Mercy,

Theresia Tina RSM ²⁸

Shortly after these incidents, Sister Helen O'Brien, the national Leader, withdrew the sisters from Neragaima as their safety was under threat and they were no longer able to carry out effective ministry for the people.

Reflections: tribal fighting

Tribal fighting, which was one of the traditional ways of settling disputes once negotiations had failed, was made illegal in colonial times. However, the practice resurfaced after independence, particularly in the case of clan rivalries, and election disappointments. Fighting involving the killing of enemy warriors, rape of women, destruction of gardens, and burning of houses, was part of the terrifying cycle. The village women related accounts of having to flee to the safety of the bush areas, clutching babies and protecting young children in former times. The women communicated these unwritten stories to the sisters in Tok Pisin and demonstrated how they would occasionally sit quietly among themselves singing these stories in plaintive vernacular chants to keep the memory alive.

The state of emergency

During the 1970s, the outbreaks of tribal fighting and the vandalism of supply trucks and unwary road travellers on the Highlands Highway led to years of the state of emergency. Highly trained police riot squad patrols were introduced to capture the vandals and restore order on this lifeline from Madang and Lae on the coast to the Western and Southern Highlands. For important meetings, the sisters occasionally took advantage of being escorted by these armed patrols over the winding places of the Daulo Pass and round the Simbu turnoff where potential ambushes threatened. But once past these areas, the sisters, in their small vehicles, could not keep pace as the patrols increased their lead over the open stretches of road.

Reminiscences of Sister Maryanne Kolkia from Goglime

Sister Maryanne Kolkia, who was taught by the sisters at Goglime, reflects in a conversation on her childhood, on the occasion of her final profession as a Sister of Mercy. The Kolkia family were well known throughout the mission community and lovingly remembered by the Sisters of Mercy there, particularly Sisters Valda Finlay and Margaret Wilson.



As for my family, especially my parents, my mother was a person who would not talk a lot, but a person of faith, who praised the Lord. There were eight of us in the family, and she was very significant in looking after all of us, including me. And I appreciate her, and all that she has done.

My father was engaged in the Church activities when the first missionaries came to my parish. He went to the pidgin school and taught the pidgin lessons, preparing people for baptism. I recognised his great faith and his forgiveness. As a leader he has a deep faith in God in his leadership. I am not surprised that he is now the Peace Mediator Chairman of the Province, appointed by the government. At my religious profession he said he couldn't believe how God works. I should be sad because the final celebration is like sending the daughter away, but I was at peace and rejoicing. I was glad to hear my father saying that with a smile.²⁹

Mercy Sisters golden jubilee celebrations – “She’s my teacher!”

At a Eucharistic celebration for the jubilee of the Sisters of Mercy in the Kefamo Chapel, the celebrant, Father Luke Apa, surprisingly began his introduction to the gathering of Mercy Sisters from PNG and Australia with the words: “Julie Rees is present here. She’s my teacher!” The joy that erupted from that spontaneous expression enveloped us all.

Julie had taught Luke as a teenager in Grades Nine and Ten at Kerowagi High School, and Luke had gone on to the seminary, completed his doctorate in Rome, and was at that time, Dean of Studies at Bomana Holy Spirit Seminary, Port Moresby.

Bishop Henk te Maarssen's invitation for the sisters to return to Simbu

At the golden jubilee Mass of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG, Bishop Henk te Maarssen SVD gave his reflections and offered an open invitation to the sisters to return to the Simbu:

The 1960s were golden years. There was a beautiful community in Goglme, a beautiful convent, and we would be very willing to return it to the Sisters of Mercy. In 1970, there was a change of policy, and the sisters had to leave their work in the community schools, and unfortunately we were unable to find other apostolates for the sisters. In the 1980s and 1990s they were mostly by ones and twos and for a time at Neragaima.

We have the four convents waiting for the sisters. It's difficult in the Highlands for girls to pursue their vocations. We have seventeen national priests in Simbu, and these number more than the sisters of all congregations there. So many girls and women would like to pursue a religious vocation and at our diocesan meeting we are looking at ways to encourage families to be more generous. We pray that we may witness a blossoming of the Sisters of Mercy for the whole of PNG.³⁰



Sunday offering - Goglme.

Endnotes

- 1 Based on the eulogy given by Father Michael McEntee at the funeral Mass of Father Louis Ambane and used with his permission.
- 2 Lingua franca in PNG.
- 3 In 1931, Tok Pisin had been adopted by the Church as the language to be used in evangelisation. Taken from Mihalik, F., SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*, Madang, DWU Press, 1998.
- 4 These words of Father Jack Sheerin have been reconstructed by the author based on anecdotal evidence and archival material.
- 5 These words ascribed to Mother Patrick have been reconstructed by the author, based on anecdotal knowledge and archival material.
- 6 Basically trained aid post nursing assistants.
- 7 Records taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.
- 8 From a conversation with Sister Rita Hassett, circa 2000.
- 9 Excerpt from an interview with Sister Mariska Kua in May, 2005.
- 10 Letter of Sister Mary Elizabeth of June 21, 1975, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Adelaide.
- 11 The report served to inform the sisters of the different congregations in Australia and encourage them in their support of the mission work.
- 12 Taken from an interview with Margaret Wilson in December, 2006.
- 13 Hospital, clinic or aid post.
- 14 Traditional dancing within the clan to the beat of drums.
- 15 Meal of meat and vegetables cooked in hot stones in a pit in the ground.
- 16 Sister Carmel Bourke features as a significant person later in the story.
- 17 Written in haste in November, 1971.
- 18 Report of the Union Leader, Sister Maria Joseph Carr, after visiting the sisters in 1973.
- 19 Vatican II *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity), 1965.
- 20 This was later presented at the 1976 Union meeting, referred to as the "consultative body".
- 21 The information that an agreement to use the former convent had been made by the Bishop Henk te Maarsen was given to me by one of the NGOs involved in the project, Tony Wrigtson (PhD) of Oxfam New Zealand.
- 22 This information was offered by Sister Elizabeth Devine in a conversation in April, 2006.
- 23 This incident was relayed in an impromptu conversation circa 1998.
- 24 The ritual of breaking the sugar cane is a symbolic part of the reconciliation ceremony.
- 25 A record of this letter was taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- 26 Sisters' surnames were offered by Sister Mary Claude, Archdiocesan Centre, Madang, 10th June, 2007.
- 27 Sweet potato, the staple diet of the Highlands' people.
- 28 Sister Theresia Tina's letter to the sisters reporting the events that led to the withdrawal of the Sisters of Mercy from Neragaima at the end of 2002.
- 29 Reported in an interview with Sister Maryanne Kolkia in 2005.
- 30 Recorded from notes taken in St Mary's Church, Goroka in May, 2006.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

CHIMBU DISTRICT
(DETAIL)





SIMBU (1963-1990)

Kup (1964-1973)

Founding Community

Elizabeth Miller
St Roch Moore

Angela Casey
Clare Flinn
Rita (Charles) Hassett
Patrick Mahoney
Noreen Collins

Closing Community

Elizabeth Miller
Clare Flinn

Koge (1965-1975)

Founding Community

Julian (Algra) Clarke
Teresa (Matthew) Flaherty

Winifred (Clement Mary)
Anderton
Rosemary Baker
Margaret Bubb
Clare Flinn
Coral Hedley
Maria Goretti McCosker
Elizabeth Miller
Margaret Shrume

Closing Community

Clare Flinn
Rosemary Baker

Goglme(1967-1973)

Founding Community

Valda (Padua) Finlay
Margaret (Patrice) Clarke

Winifred (Clement Mary)
Anderton
Rosemary Baker
Margaret Bubb
Margaret Shrume
Rose (Margaret) Wilson

Closing Community

Valda (Padua) Finlay
Rose (Margaret) Wilson

Lay Missionaries

Kup

Dorothy Quade, Monica Naylor, Marie Nicholas, Father Quoite and builders from Forbes
Joan and John Montgomery, Paul Buckley.

Koge

Jan Birmingham, Anne Flaherty, Tricia Bubb

Kondiu

John Abbott

Wangoi

Jan Birmingham - First Head Teacher of Wangoi Primary School (1971)

Early Simbu Ministries

Primary Education, Supervision of Teachers, Co-ordination of Religious Education, Nursing, Health Clinics and MCH. and Management of Sub-Health Centres - Kup, Goglme and Koge. School Inspection, Vocational Centre Management, Village Pastoral Work, Commencement and Supervision of Catholic Schools and Training of National Head Teachers at Parua, Tuli, Giu and Nebare in the Koge Area. Supervision of Catholic Schools and Training of National Head Teachers at Womatne, Barengigl and Gagnmambuno in the Goglme area, High School Teaching - Kerowagi and Muaina, Hospitality.





**Neragaima
(1971-1973) (1980-1985)**

Founding Community

Coral Hedley
Margaret (Patrice) Clarke

.....
Joan Adams
Margaret Bubb
Noreen Collins
Marie Dagg
Elizabeth Devine
Valda (Padua) Finlay
Elizabeth Miller
Therese Quinlivan
Margaret Shrume

**Closing Community:
1973**

Coral Hedley
Elizabeth Devine

Ministries Primary Education,
Religious Education
Supervision of Teachers,
Health Management and
MCH

**Neragaima
(1999-2002)**

Founding Community

(National sisters)
Sophie Samiak
Margaret Roni
Maryanne Kolkia

.....
Claudia Apalenda
Maryanne Kolkia
Margaret Roni
Sophie Samiak
Theresia Tina

Closing Community

Maryanne Kolkia
Theresia Tina

Ministries Primary
Education, Religious
Education Supervision
of Teachers, Health
Management and MCH,
HIV/AIDS Awareness

**Kondiu
(1974-1990)**

Founding Community

Valda (Padua) Finlay
Elizabeth Devine

.....
Mary Eamon Brennan
Carmel Carroll
Lynne Connellan
Clare Flinn
Mavis McBride
Winifred McManus
Elizabeth Miller
Deirdre Murphy
Angeline Singiat
Mary Stallard

Closing Community

Mary Stallard

Ministries High School
Education Supervision of
Female Students, Supervision
of Teachers, Co-ordination of
Religious Education,

Mingende (1973-1982) – Catholic Education Secretary

Rita Hassett

Kerowagi Provincial High School (1972-1976, 1980)

Noreen Collins, Julie Rees

Kundiawa Provincial Hospital (1973 and Mount Hagen Hospital (1975-1977)

Margaret (Rose) Wilson

Muaina (1974) and Mount Wilhelm Provincial High School (1987-1989)

Clare Flinn

Barawagi Technical School (2002-2003)

Student: Theodora Talili

Mingende Vocational Centre (2002-2003)

Students: Robina Einde and Catherine Hopil



CALLED BACK TO GOROKA (1974) - A SECOND WAVE

New ministries in a national context

When the last band of Sisters of Mercy departed from Goroka for Simbu (known in colonial times as Chimbu) in 1967, leaving their newly-built convent to the Holy Spirit Sisters, it seemed their ministry presence on the Goroka side of the Daulo Pass had come to an end. As missionaries of the diocese, they were always welcomed at the headquarters at Kefamo, but their ministries remained firmly based in Simbu.

Towards the end of 1973, Sister Rita Hassett accepted the role of work with catechists and teachers of the Goroka Diocese, taking up residence in Simbu. This ministry involved supervision and pastoral care of the Catholic teachers at Faniufa, Tafeto and Yamiufa in the Goroka area. Shortly after this time, with the opening of national and diocesan institutions in this flourishing Highlands centre, new and different needs emerged. And so it happened, that one by one, from Simbu, from Wewak, or as new recruits from Australia, Sisters of Mercy appeared again in Goroka.

In January 1974, Sister Teresa (Tess) Flaherty made a memorable return journey over the Daulo Pass to begin ministry as a lecturer at Goroka Teachers College, the government-run secondary teacher education institution. Tess's experience in advisory and inspection work in the Simbu had exposed her to the significant role of education and teacher education in promoting equality and unity in the emerging nation.

Four years later, other Sisters of Mercy began to arrive – not as communities like the first group – but to take on specialist ministries in national institutions that had evolved in Goroka. The Church was in the process of redefining its role in the modern world and in particular cultures, and seeking appropriate renewal of religious life. Guided by the resounding message of 'We are the Church!' vigorous attempts were being made for the Church to build upon Melanesian foundations of spirituality and culture. Through the generosity of John Cohill, Bishop of Goroka, land was made available for national Church institutes to promote the new theology and explore its implications. These institutes were authorised or supported by the bishops and included the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (LCI), the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service (MI), and the Communications Institute (CI).

Sisters of Mercy throughout the country had been involved in catechetical, liturgical, missiological and theological discussions and exploration of the growing local Church in Melanesia. Some of the sisters from the Goroka and Wewak Dioceses were among the first to serve under contract in these new institutes. This ministry brought sisters with their parish and diocesan experience into the crucial arena of the development of a nation. They were in step with the latest mission theology, as expounded and researched by leading Church figures in Catholic and ecumenical circles. Among these were key members of the MI and LCI, notably Fathers Herman Janssen MSC and Joe Knoebel SVD (founding members of MI), Father Ennio Mantovani SVD (later its director), and Fathers Jim Knight SVD and Bill Seifert SVD (research staff members). Fathers Kees van der Geest SVD and Henk te Maarssen SVD, early directors of LCI, saw the potential of particular Sisters of Mercy and encouraged them in these new fields.

Sisters at the Melanesian Institute

Sister Wendy Flannery from Yarapos in the Wewak Diocese was the first to join the academic research staff and was for a time deputy director of the Melanesian Institute. Wendy participated in conducting orientation courses for missionaries, and was engaged in ground-breaking research into Melanesian spirituality and its developments through contemporary indigenous religious movements.

Two sisters from Australia responded to requests for staffing assistance. Sister Romley (Vianney) Dirrman organised, modernised and extended the research library. On her departure, the library was managed by a lay person, Mrs Beatrice Mamo. Sister Helen O'Brien served as editor of the ecumenical Melanesian Institute publications – *Catalyst* and *Point*. Publication of these articles, written by expatriate and national Church, religious and lay people, fostered a reliable knowledge base and growing consciousness of the reality of Christ in Melanesia, in all areas of the nation – Church and religion, politics and government, culture and language, ecology, changing society and economic development. For a time, Mrs Lynn Giddings assisted in the editing task, and later the position of editor was localised by a national person, Mr Alphonse Aime. Sister Ann Francis Carroll served for a time as editor of the *Tok Pisin* periodical of the Melanesian Institute – *Umben* [Net]. In 1999, Sister Angeline Singiat was engaged in a training program as a research assistant there.

Sister Mavis McBride from Kondiul lived at the Melanesian Institute while working as secretary for the Commission of Bishops and Religious in preparing and publishing materials for adult religious formation, materials which had been appropriately translated into 'controlled English'.² Mavis also organised and managed the accredited religious education programs by distance mode, serving the needs of national religious brothers, sisters and teachers in the field. Mavis worked in a nearby diocesan centre, assisted by her secretary and typist Josephine Druagle. This office was later occupied by the Mount Sion Centre for the Blind and used as their optical workshop.

Sisters at the Liturgical Catechetical Institute

Situated in Goroka North at the opposite end of town from the Diocesan Offices and the Melanesian Institute, and across from the Goroka Technical College, was the LCI. This national institute was formed to publish and distribute materials in 'controlled English' and *Tok Pisin* for use by catechists and teachers throughout PNG and the Solomon Islands.

At different times, sisters played important roles on the staff of LCI. The first of these was Sister Judith Hourigan from Wewak who served as editor. Later, Sister Marie Dagg, from the original founding group, moved from Holy Trinity Teachers College to become the manager of the bookshop. Marie also did evening pastoral work with the families and clans of her former students in the village centres round Goroka. Sister Anne Frances Carroll from Wewak became editor of English and *Tok Pisin* publications and was able to leave these responsibilities in the capable hands of a former Yarapos student, Rosa Koian. As financial manager, Sister Nance Munro from Australia worked diligently to help develop the skills of Francesca Worovi, a national woman, who eventually replaced her in the position. Sister Nance brought expertise in financial management and previous experience on the Union General Council in Canberra.

Directors of LCI when the Sisters of Mercy were there were John Reedy, a lay missionary, with his family, from the Catechists' Training College at Pumakos, followed by Gunther Koller SM from the diocese of Bougainville.

Being involved at MI and LCI meant that sisters were living on a specific campus and forming community with clerics, religious and lay colleagues on the staff, and with members of different congregations or from other Christian Churches. The directors of these institutes were caring in their provision of accommodation and appreciative of the professional contribution the sisters were making towards unravelling the wide-ranging issues of the developing nation.

Goroka Teachers College – University of Goroka

When Sister Tess Flaherty moved from Simbu to take on the duties of lecturing and pastoral care of students, she found herself working with international staff and with students from all parts of the country and other Pacific Islands nations. She was accommodated at the diocesan Centre at Kefamo and inducted into the government scene by Sister Mona Sackley OLSH who was also living there and working at the Teachers College at the time. After moving to the teachers college campus, there were times when Tess alone formed the Sisters of Mercy Goroka! At such times she was grateful for the support of friends in the parish, the religious and lay missionaries of the Diocese and staff members of the Goroka campus. Sister Winifred Smith OLSH, former Principal of Kabaleo Teachers College, Rabaul, was often at hand to lend a listening ear. Teaching practice supervision, and in time, consultations with the major teacher education institutions and United Nations consultancies to the trouble-torn Province of Bougainville, offered an exposure to local and national issues.

In 29 years at Goroka, Tess was part of the different stages of the institution as it passed from the status of Secondary Teachers College to that of Campus of the University of Papua New Guinea (1975) and finally tertiary institution in its own right as the University of Goroka (1997). During that time, the administration of the institution was completely localised and the academic staff almost entirely so – a number of administrative and academic staff being her former teachers college students. The first Vice Chancellor was Dr Mark Solon, and the first Chancellor was one of the first students of Faniufa, Mr Stephen Eka. Completing higher qualifications at Michigan State University (MA) and Macquarie University (PhD) enabled Tess to express a new 'voice' for women in education through publication and negotiating policies for girls and women in educational institutions. It was through a grant from the Canada Fund with the support of the Co-ordinator, Mrs Hélène Anderson, and the services of Father Nick de Groot (Director of MI) and publications staff, that the thesis "The Women's Voice in Education" was published by the Melanesian Institute.

Aiyura National High School

Invited by the Bishop of the diocese, sisters undertook ministries as they were appointed under contract to national government institutions. During successive years from 1978 to 1989, Sisters Bernadette Marks, Julie Rees, Agnes Murphy and Miriam Devine were on the academic staff, and exercised the role of Dean of Women at Aiyura National High School, situated some 70 kilometres east of Goroka, just off the Highlands highway in the direction of Lae. The sisters were influential role models for young women who needed encouragement in achieving

their academic potential, particularly in the subjects of mathematics and science which were the particular specialisations of these sisters. In addition to teaching and religious education commitments, the sisters performed specific pastoral roles for the students, particularly the young women in their care and the Catholic students and staff.

The sisters taught their subject specialisations and were often subject department heads responsible for the professional development of the national staff in their departments. They were respected for an openness and impartiality which enabled them to be an acceptable part of the social fabric of this rather isolated institution. The sisters saw themselves in an active ministry of the diocese. They undertook the rigours of the journeys to Goroka and to the Highlands sisters to maintain these relationships. Needless to say, on occasions, these journeys were enthusiastically reciprocated. Sister Miriam Devine was the last sister to leave Aiyura in 1989.

Bishops of the Goroka Diocese

When Bishop Cohill, who, through his patronage had encouraged these new ministries, retired from office, the co-adjutor Bishop Raymond Caesar succeeded him in Goroka. After the death of Bishop Caesar in 1985, Reverend Michael Marai from Wewak was ordained Bishop of Goroka in 1989, and at his request, Sister Nell Callaghan spent some months assisting in the localisation of the clerical staff at the diocesan administration centre. On Bishop Marai's retirement, Bishop Francesco Sarego was ordained Bishop of Goroka on January 29, 1996. All of the Goroka bishops provided inspiration and encouragement by including sisters in their visions for the Church. They offered accommodation and hospitality to the Sisters of Mercy for retreats, religious celebrations, assemblies and gatherings at the beautiful Diocesan Centre at Kefamo, which was almost a second home.

Sisters at the Diocesan Centre at Kefamo

Sister Margaret Bubb, who had worked in vocational and religious formation of teachers in Simbu, was requested to assist in the co-ordination of the Pastoral Centre at Goroka. Leaving the arduous travel of Simbu behind her, Margaret moved to Goroka and collaborated in this ministry with Deacon Francesco Sarego (who was later ordained to priestly ministry, elected as Provincial of the PNG SVDs and ordained Bishop of Goroka in 1996). Margaret also played an important role in supervising the national young women in charge of the domestic arrangements. After the unification of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG in 1981, the new Leader, Sister Helen O'Brien, had temporary pilgrim status in her first years, until her move to Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen, and the eventual establishment of the administration centre at McAuley House. This was in the Hagen area, which was a more central location for the Highlands and Coastal sisters. Sister Clare Flinn, who had completed her contract at Mount Wilhelm High School and term as financial manager of the united Sisters of Mercy at McAuley House, became manager of the Kefamo Centre and did much to maintain the beauty of the rooms and the surroundings, in the tradition of the SVD Brother, Damian Lunders, whose artistic talent and hospitable spirit was evident in the original setting up of the complex.

The Goroka Diocesan Centre at Kefamo was a popular centre for the Union of Women Religious (UWR) meetings. The Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS), Sisters of Notre Dame (SND), Marist

Sisters (SMSM), Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI) and the Sisters of Mercy gathered in solidarity in prayer and sharing of developments in ministry. Originally the sisters from Lae formed part of the group, but the constant dangers of travel eventually made their attendance impossible. Male religious orders, the Christian Brothers, Marist Brothers, Franciscans, John of God Brothers and Holy Family Priests, working in the diocese with the Divine Word missionaries, frequented the diocesan centre for retreats and social events. With the growth of the local Church, these groups were enriched and enlivened by vibrant young national people – priests, religious and lay who were at first in the minority – but gradually outnumbered their expatriate elders.

Over the years, the Sisters of Mercy have received a warm welcome at the houses of other religious women in Goroka – commencing with Sisters Gerarda and Sebastian, and followed by Ewaldine, Erminberg, Wilhelmina, Mary Angela and Mary Anthida of the Holy Spirit Sisters, and Sister Winifred Smith of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The Burning Bush House of Prayer

Many are the PNG pilgrims who have found solace and peace at the Burning Bush House of Prayer within the beautiful and tranquil setting of the Kefamo grounds. Here, exquisite orchids and colourful bougainvilleas, bright fluttering butterflies and darting dragonflies are sometimes reflected in the sunlit or mystically shadowed waters of shapely defined ponds. These grounds have offered a spiritual centre not only for those of the diocese, but for many priests, religious and lay people throughout the country. Sister Mary Eamon Brennan, after 13 years of teaching at Kondiu, then assisting the young women interested in being Sisters of Mercy in their correspondence studies at Mount Hagen, found a ministry in prayer, catering and hospitality here, as did Sister Vicki Sant from the Rockhampton Diocese, some years later. The House of Prayer was founded by the Divine Word Priests and Holy Spirit Sisters under the directorship of Father Ed Dudink SVD and Sister Patricia Sneider SSpS. They were followed by Father Alois Klein SVD, Sister Christa Murphy SSpS, Sister Margaret Scheimer, SSJ, Father Alois Blasil SVD, Sister Ignatiele Forsthövel SSpS, and Pat Hogan SVD.

Significant events for Sisters of Mercy at Kefamo

For the Sisters of Mercy, two most significant events occurred at the Diocesan Centre at Kefamo – the first being the election during the assembly of the first Leader of the unified group of Sisters of Mercy, Sister Helen O'Brien in 1981, and the second, the election of the first PNG national sister, Sister Mariska Kua in 2002 (to begin office in 2003). These were milestones in the Mercy history and occasions of great jubilation and sense of new beginnings.

Millennium reflections

During the second wave of the sisters at Goroka, each sister was ultimately engaged in promoting localisation and the growth of the local Church. This was a conscious commitment, not only in Goroka, but also in the sister foundations in the Wewak and Mount Hagen Dioceses.

Sister Anne Frances Carroll's ministry in Goroka may be used as an example. After leaving the ministry of teaching and diocesan religion advisor in the Diocese of Wewak (1971-1983),

Anne moved to Goroka where she became editor of the publications at LCI (1984-1987) before going on to be editor of the *Tok Pisin* publications at MI (1989-1991). While engaged in these ministries, Anne immersed herself in study and understanding of the cultures of PNG, and in the dialogue of faith, culture and life in a changing PNG. She was then requested by the bishops to become Director of Evangelisation (1992-1997). As before, she continued to work diligently to involve national people in the pastoral field. Sister Bosco Taman FMI replaced her in this position in 1998.

Sister Bosco, currently the Leader of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate (FMI), reflected on Anne Frances' ministry as the Catholic Church prepared for the Year of Jubilee for the millennium:

Bishop Kalisz was the bishop leading the Commission of Evangelisation, and he and the other bishops trusted Anne in this role. She had a vision for localisation and was willing and interested in training people to be leaders. For me personally, being in training was not an easy job, and Anne wanted me to be stabilised in the job, to be responsible and committed. Anne was a concerned woman who wanted more and more women to take up responsibility. She stood for that – for raising the women's dignity, and she was against anybody downgrading the position of women, especially in matters about evangelisation in the dioceses. She insisted the whole process of evangelisation had to be implemented in each diocese, that is, bringing the Good News, making alive the Gospel values in every ministry – in politics, family life, in prison, in all walks of life. Evangelisation has to do with everyday life – the way we talk and socialise with the community. It is presenting the Christ within us to others, and in our courses in the diocese it was our job to help people understand this more fully. We targeted groups in education, family life, youth and women.³

A NEW COMMUNITY IN GOROKA (2003) – THE THIRD WAVE

The continued sisters' presence in Goroka was secured through the purchase of a residence on the outskirts of Goroka town. Since attempts to acquire a land lease for a novitiate in the cool, invigorating climate of the Highlands several years earlier had proved fruitless, the successful acquisition of this property was seen by many sisters as an answer to prayer. As bursar, Sister Julie Anne Ryan had shown foresight in looking out for properties on offer in Goroka and Mount Hagen, and the ideal one eventually presented itself towards the end of 2002 – the future Coolock House.

From the beginning, the property was used as the House of Formation. Sister Carmel Martin, the formation mistress and two sisters in temporary vows, who were attending the Goroka Grammar School, Sisters Lilian Yopichi and Marylyne Yull, were in residence. For the two previous years, Sister Philomena Waira, who was then joined by Lilian and Marylyne, had been kindly accommodated by the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Sisters in their House of Studies in North Goroka. In 2005, the decision was taken to establish the novitiate at Coolock and Sister Helen White, mistress of formation, Theresa Boyek, in pastoral ministry, Catherine Hopil, a Junior Professed sister, and Hilda Yangele, a novice, formed the community.

Coolock House is some 15 minutes drive north-west from Goroka town. Once the protective bitumen covering is left behind at the Goroka Base Hospital, the gravel road winds through coffee growing areas on the way towards the prison at Bihute, in the direction of the Unggai mountains and Simbu beyond. Near the turnoff to Bihute, perched high in a commanding position overlooking the Asaro valley, lies Coolock. This is on a wide plot of land, with the house and *haus win*² attractively surrounded with shrubs, orchids and flower beds on the rather flat top section and, after a series of steep terraces, the sisters' vegetable gardens stretch in rows below. From the top veranda one can witness the ever-changing beauty of the landscape opposite. One's gaze rises easily from the mottled greens, browns and golds of the hillsides covered with defined vegetable and coffee plots, guarded here and there by the villagers' homes, to the dark blue of the towering mountain ranges stacked unevenly in the distance and on to the restless clouds of the skies above. This picture tells a story of the many different clans – Simbus, Bundis, Unggais – that have settled in the rural areas outside of Goroka town, seeking work on the coffee plantations or having been offered land leases by the original Gahuku owners.

Mercy ministries in Goroka

The sisters soon engaged in the life of the local Church, through ministries in the area, including the women in the prison at nearby Bihute. Besides prayer and Bible sharing, Sister Theresa Boyek introduced the women to adaptations of the cooking and preservation of local food, skills that would be useful on their return home with their families. Besides companioning the sisters in formation, Sister Helen White, as did Carmel Martin before her, carried out a special Religious Education program with Brother Gerry Buzolik CFC for the lecturers of the Catholic Teachers Colleges, St Benedicts (Wewak), Holy Trinity (Mount Hagen) and Kabaleo (Rabaul). This program, initiated by Brother Andrew Simpson CFC, Chairperson of the Catholic Higher Education Association, is further explained in Chapter 9.

Sister Catherine Hopil was engaged in catering and hospitality at the Diocesan Centre at

Kefamo. She saw her role of service from perspectives gained from experience within her own family:

At home we used to give things to people who came to our house and share things with them. But my family used to tell me that if you want to help another person, you have to help your own family first if they are in need.

As a Melanesian sister I feel I should help my own sisters before going out to others in need. I have learnt this from my parents and others at home. You start with your own family and community, before you reach out to other people. I now know that when people come and ask for things, we have to encourage them to work in their garden and to do this, instead of relying on us.

We try to help them to find ways to help themselves instead of giving all the time and making our people lazy. If I am good at cooking or sewing, I can teach the ones in the settlement to cook for themselves, or sew so that they can sell clothes at the market. We can teach them to be self-reliant. It is time for us to speak out to our people.⁵

The sisters experienced support from Father John Ryan SVD, the parish priest of St Mary's, Goroka. The catechist, Peter Umba, a former student of the sisters at Kondiu, living with his family beside the village church, acted as a most reliable support, 'care-taker' and 'security' person for the sisters, particularly in their settling in time.

The Mercy Jubilee Project – meeting contemporary needs of women

In 2005, the Mercy Jubilee Project was initiated. This was a project utilising the expertise and experience of an Australian and a PNG Sister of Mercy. As Project Manager, Sister Gaye Lennon of Gunnedah came with ten years of valuable experience working with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the refugee camps of Pakistan and on the Thai/Burma border. Gaye was competent in the areas of project management, educational training and development work with women. Sister Maryanne Kolkia of Goglime came as a gifted teacher who had risen to the rank of Senior Teacher and had upgraded her teaching qualifications, while teaching full time, to the Diploma in Teaching – Primary, mainly by external studies. The task of these two women was to research the contemporary issues and injustices of women, and to seek to address both the justice issues involved and ways of alleviating suffering. The Sisters of Mercy PNG see this joint sisterly venture as a constructive one. It not only seeks to improve the lives of women in need and assist them within their own families and society, but also provides an opportunity for professional skills to be utilised and developed by the PNG sisters themselves.

Mercy Works Incorporated is an arm of the Institute providing financial and resource support for ministries of the Institute both in Australia and in other countries. The project was initiated by the then Executive Director, Sister Maryanne Loughry, and support has since continued with her successor, Sister Rosemary Carroll. Other financial contributors are the Sisters of Mercy Gunnedah, Caritas Australia and a private donor. The Bishop of Goroka, Francesco Sarego, has offered collaborative support in providing initial accommodation and an office and work base for the sisters in Goroka.

The Mercy Works PNG Project - Goroka began in 2005 as the Jubilee Project with a 'Needs Assessment' to identify root causes of common problems faced by women in the Goroka area

- in the towns, in settlements on the outskirts of town and the surrounding villages. The results showed there were serious problems of unemployment, *sanguma*⁶, STD's and HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, violence, crime and gender inequality. As these problems had deep social and cultural roots, Sisters Gaye and Maryanne decided to include men in some of the programs and activities they were planning to offer.

The Project has received the full approval of Sister Mariska Kua and the leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy Region. Experienced national sisters with particular specialisations have been assigned to the project. These include Sister Theresa Boyek (prison ministry, advocacy), Sister Veronica Localyo (HIV/AIDS education and emotional support, budgeting), and Sister Robina Einde (receptionist and vocational training).

The Centre has been set up near the Diocesan Administration complex. This location has proved to be a very convenient place as it is near the ever-popular town market and within easy walking distance of the town and highway bus routes.

The members of the Mercy Works PNG Project - Goroka team conduct courses (eg; human rights, budgeting, management), provide emotional support and write referrals for sick and mentally ill patients, offer skills training, accompany juveniles to court, make on site visits to the women prisoners and communities in the settlements and villages.

The philosophy of the Mercy Works is to work in collaboration with other organizations with similar goals of service, skills training and empowerment, and to avoid duplication of programs. Examples of related organizations in various fields in Goroka are: Diocesan HIV/AIDS Office, Centre of Hope, YWCA, Family Voice PNG, Family Health Association, Save the Children in PNG, Family Life, UNICEF, St. Mary's Catholic Women's Association.

The sisters bring their unique specialisations and apply their cultural experience and knowledge to the situation. They also learn and develop skills through their interaction with staff and clients, as well as through participation in further training opportunities made available to them under Sister Gaye's direction and supervision.

The initiative, industry and involvement of the sisters has made an impact as the programs offered have touched the lives of so many suffering from lack of basic human rights. In very practical ways, women, men, young people, even members of *raskol* [criminal] youth gangs have been helped to make the changes to live and work with dignity. Needless to say, like so many other previous initiatives of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG, the sisters have begun this work under difficult situations and with minimal resources. These Mercy pioneers go forward in trust that they are being called to this new ministry, as Catherine was called to the poor of Dublin over 150 years ago.

Jubilee words of mercy by Bishop Francesco Sarego⁷

In the homily of the eucharistic celebration in Goroka Bishop Francesco Sarego offered his reflections on the contemporary challenges facing the Sisters of Mercy:

The image of the mercy of God is reflected in those who practise mercy. As Sisters of Mercy the essence of your spirituality is dwelling and ministering within a dynamic circle of God's mercy. This calls for the grateful receiving and the gracious giving of mercy to those in need. As we come to this Jubilee celebration we remember with thanksgiving the pioneer and early sisters, who, clad in their long religious habits, responded to the situations of the past, especially in education, health and pastoral concerns. The situation today and into the future calls upon new responses to help people, especially women and children facing injustice, violence, sickness, including HIV/AIDS, and abandoned street children.

National sisters of today, you can learn from your 'elders' as you continue what they have started and handed over to you. Now that this responsibility and commitment is in your hands, do not be afraid. There are always difficulties, but have courage; God who has been present in the past will always be with you.

Looking ahead to the ministries of the next 50 years be aware that unless everything is built on holiness that is personal and communitarian, nothing will come to fruition. With this holiness as your foundation, everything is possible. Wishing everyone a good celebration and an invitation to the next 50 years celebration! God bless you all.

Bishop's Francesco's words resonated well with the ideal of the Sisters of Mercy to foster the love and compassion of Christ Jesus through the mission of Mercy to all God's people.

Endnotes

- ¹ One of the outcomes of the PNG Self-Study (1972-1975).
- ² Simplified English translations appropriate for people whose first language is not English.
- ³ This was noted from an impromptu conversation at Goroka in May 2005.
- ⁴ Outside shelter used for cooking and socialising.
- ⁵ An excerpt taken from a conversation in Goroka, May, 2006.
- ⁶ Sorcery, witchcraft.
- ⁷ From the Homily of the Eucharistic Celebration of April 29, 2006.



GOROKA (1974-2006)

University of Goroka – Former Goroka Teachers College (1974-2002)

Teresa Flaherty

Diocesan Catholic Education Secretary

Rita Hassett

Aiyura National High School (1978-1989)

Bernadette Marks, Julie Rees, Agnes Murphy, Miriam Devine

Melanesian Institute

Wendy Flannery, Helen O'Brien, Vianney Dirrman, Mavis McBride,
Anne Frances Carroll, Angeline Singiat

Kefamo Pastoral and Diocesan Centre (1974-)

Margaret Bubb, Helen O'Brien, Teresa Flaherty, Clare Flinn, Nell Callaghan, Catherine Hopil

Liturgical Catechetical Institute (LCI)

Judith Hourigan, Marie Dagg, Nance Munro, Anne Frances Carroll

House of Prayer

Mary Eamon Brennan, Vicki (Victorina) Sant

National Office for Evangelisation (1993-1998)

Anne Frances Carroll, Mary Nambakwen

OLSH Convent – Student Sisters

Philomena Waira, Lilian Yopichi, Marylyne Yull

Coolock House (2003-2006)

Carmel Martin, Lilian Yopichi, Marylyn Yull, Helen White, Theresa Boyek,
Catherine Hopil, Hilda Yangele

Lay Missionaries

Wendy (Kiss) Murphy, Monica (Huppatz) O'Connor, Mary (O'Loughlin) Hofhaus



Chapter 4

FEDERATION SISTERS TO WEWAK – 1957

After her election as Leader of the Brisbane Congregation Mother Damian Duncombe lost no time in responding to the Apostolic Delegate's appeal for missionary sisters. Just twelve months after the four Union Sisters landed in Goroka, a band of seven sisters from the Brisbane Congregation headed northwards for Wewak, destined for the remote mission station of Kunjingini. A year later five sisters from Brisbane, Rockhampton, Cairns, Townsville and Grafton made a similar journey to Wewak, on their way to Torembe near the Sepik River.



Sisters Isobel Condon, Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy, Val (Philip) Cervetto, Margarita Shannon, Francis Regis Everingham (Superior), Marietta Riedy and Cephas Philben¹.

BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO KUNJINGINI IN THE WEWAK DIOCESE (1957-)

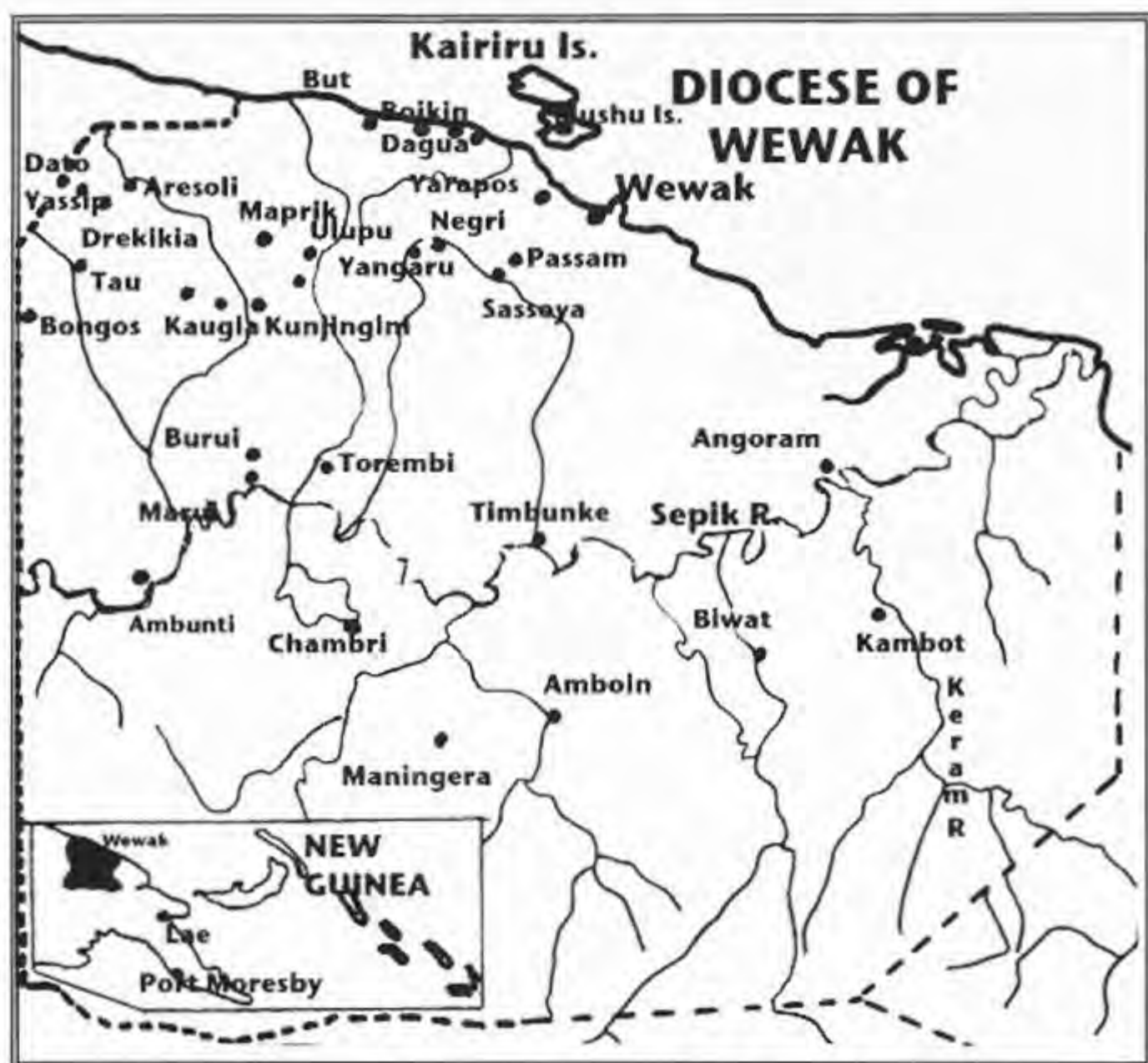
Wewak was part of the Madang Vicariate until restructured after World War II as a separate vicariate. In 1948, a young and energetic priest, Leo Arkfeld SVD was appointed its bishop with the title of Vicar Apostolic of the East Sepik Vicariate of New Guinea.²

With all the previous destruction caused by the Japanese occupation, Bishop Arkfeld had to make an important decision – where to situate the headquarters in his vast diocese of 15,000 square miles. His predecessor, Bishop Joseph Loerks, who, with other European missionaries was executed on the Japanese ship, Akikaze Maru in 1943, had his diocesan centre on Kairiru Island.³ This was a practical choice as most of the stations were positioned along the coast on the islands and along the Sepik River, and thus were accessible by boat. However, when missionaries returned to the mission stations along the Sepik after the war, some of them ventured further inland to the grass country and the Sepik plains, which rose gradually from the river's edge to the coastal mountains some 50 miles to the north. To their amazement, they found an extremely densely populated area similar to the Highlands in the Maprik and Yangoru areas. They quickly opened up stations among the Wosera people, making Kunjingini their central mission station. Soon the pre-war number of 15 mission stations in the diocese was increased to 40!



Bishop Arkfeld in the pilot's seat of Cessna 170B, VH-AVE, Wewak's first Cessna⁴.

In the stage of rebuilding the diocese, Bishop Arkfeld felt that they were entering a new period of history and the proper place for the headquarters was Wewak itself. As there were no roads, he decided to level out airstrips at the mission stations and fly by plane. Linking the stations by air would make travel much quicker than by boat and enable him to keep in frequent touch with mission personnel and parishioners.



Diocese of Wewak.³

Bishop Arkfeld prepares his case for missionary sisters

The Bishop was now ready to find some sisters trained in teaching and nursing. His thoughts went to his Australian neighbours, the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy. He had heard from the Apostolic Delegate that, although they were hard pressed in meeting the needs in post-war Australia, the sisters there were prepared to go on mission. Their newly elected Leader, Mother Damian, first President of the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, had taken seriously the words of Pope Pius XII, that if religious congregations were not willing to expand, they would die. She had a heart open to the call to mission.

With this inside information, and armed with an existing bond with the sisters he had got to know several years earlier as he waited for his visa to enter New Guinea, he set out in hope to make a personal call to Mother Damian at All Hallows Convent in Brisbane.

Bishop Arkfeld makes his request to Mother Damian



Bishop Leo Arkfeld SVD.

"When I heard Mother Damian was the President of the Federation Group I had no hesitation in approaching her for sisters for Wewak. Although I did not know her personally I had come to know some of the Brisbane sisters almost 10 years ago when I arrived from the States. While waiting for the ban on foreigners to be lifted after the War so that I could get my visa to enter New Guinea I carried out my priestly duties at St Stephen's Parish in the Brisbane Archdiocese.

I have not forgotten the day I stopped at All Hallows and suggested to Mother Damian that I was interested in getting Mercies for Wewak. She made no comment, except, "I would not be against it!" That changed everything from LOW GEAR to HIGH GEAR - And it stayed in High Gear ever since! "⁶

Mother Damian finds out for herself, and chooses Kunjingini



Mother Damian Duncombe.

"I was inspired by the thought of sending sisters to the mission, and knew the vast needs as described to us in Bishop Arkfeld's letters. Our bursar, Sister Brigid Higgins, and I decided to go up to Wewak to see the conditions and choose the place. We were welcomed by the sisters there, the Holy Spirit Sisters and the Rosary Sisters, a newly founded religious order of indigenous women, in whose convent we stayed. Bishop Leo has taken us by plane to some of the mission stations in the diocese - Kunjingini, Burui, Torembi, Kairiru, Dagua, Turubu and Marienberg - and we have chosen the poorest place, Kunjingini, which is also the most populated area. At Kunjingini the Luluais and Tultuls and many people were assembled and the Bishop told them that sisters would like to come. He then asked them if they would like that. After some consultation among themselves they agreed: "Yes, we would like sisters to come."

Consequently, we have returned to Brisbane and gone ahead choosing seven sisters from a long list of 150 volunteers."⁷

Mother Damian's heart for mission

*"Although the leaders of the Federation all share the vision of mission they cannot spare the sisters just now. Meanwhile, I'll do my very best to encourage them and spread the news of the mission. We have built up a good bond of friendship among ourselves. Mother Philomena from Monte and Thecla from Parramatta regret that, considering their desperate needs in the under-staffed Sydney schools, now crowded with migrants and refugees, they could not put the pressure on Cardinal Gilroy to release sisters at this stage. The Central (Rockhampton), North (Townsville) and Far-North (Cairns) Queensland leaders are keen to send sisters. There's some talk that Rockhampton and Townsville may even send communities of their own in the future."*⁸

The names of the pioneer sisters were: Francis Regis Everingham (Superior), Isobel Condon (nurse), Carthage (Bridie) Fennessy (teacher), Philip (Val) Cervetto (music and cooking), Margarita Shannon (teacher training) Marietta Riedy and Cephias Philben (teachers).

The Apostolic Delegate was grateful for the contingent of seven sisters and came to Brisbane for the presentation of mission crosses. The ceremony took place in St Stephen's Cathedral on January 27, 1957 at 3.00 pm in the presence of a packed congregation.⁹

Bound for Kunjingini

The first group of sisters left Brisbane at 11.45 pm on January 29, and after a brief stopover at Port Moresby, proceeded to Lae where they were transported by plane piloted by Bishop Arkfeld to Madang. Hit by a sudden tropical storm, they took shelter in the hangar before proceeding on to Wewak where they arrived on January 30. After a short induction of a week by the Holy Spirit Sisters and the national congregation of the Rosary Sisters, who welcomed them into their convent, they flew by plane from the Wirui airstrip to Kunjingini. They were officially greeted in a brief but memorable ceremony. Those present were the parish priest, Father Blasig SVD, Father Crysberg SVD from Maprik and Father Peter O'Reilly SVD (the Diocesan Education Officer who had helped Father Blasig extend the house and make general preparations). Father Seigal SVD, Mr Arthur Carey, the patrol officer of Maprik, and an assembly of catechists, and government officials, the local *luluais* and *tultuls*.¹⁰ The second group travelled by ship with essential goods and resources which had been collected by Mother Brigid Higgins from the sisters, lay people and Mercy school students.¹¹



Kunjingini Church 1957.

Settling in the new convent



Sisters' convent, Kunjigini 1957.

The sisters' early impressions of settling in at Kunjigini are expressed in letters and the sisters' chronicles.

The convent is quite open, there being no doors to close to keep out anyone who might want to enter, but the only unasked for visitors we have had are a cat (come to stay) and a dog (came only for a visit). We feel perfectly safe at night and sleep without fear... The people do not come near the house, night or day, unless they have something for us, and somebody often comes along with a bunch of bananas or a paw paw or a few mami,¹² or tomatoes or pit pit.¹³

The Bishop sent out an extra priest to help the sisters to settle in. He is Father O'Reilly, the first of those Australians ordained from Marburg to find his way to New Guinea. He is a very handy carpenter, and before our arrival assisted Father Blasig in the making of tables, chairs, kneelers, beds and parts of the buildings round about. The beds are the smartest ever. They are made of wood and laths of bamboo... Father O'Reilly is also putting together desks, the parts of which were made at the Mission sawmill and delivered to Burui by boat and from there by jeep.¹⁴

Mother Damian and Mother Brigid had collected and sent many items for the sisters – these included tinned foods, groceries, all utensils for the kitchen, folding wooden cupboards, stove, refrigerator and other household goods. They also provided educational materials and sports equipment.¹⁵

The beginning

When the Brisbane sisters came to PNG, the Superior was considered responsible for the care of the community of sisters, with their mission being under the jurisdiction of the Mother Superior in Brisbane. Mother Regis' deference and openness is reflected in excerpts from letters portraying their early impressions.

Father has mentioned five village schools he wants us to go to. He has proposed that we have three afternoons in here and four mornings at Kunjigini, and spend the other afternoon and whole day at the village. Have we permission to go to these villages alone,

Mother General?

The big problem is the Pidgin.¹⁶ The people speak at a terrific speed and pronounce their words with a strange accent. We find it hard to make out what they say. We can follow the Bishop's Pidgin and also the Priest's Pidgin. No doubt, we will get accustomed to it soon. Pidgin is not as easy as it seems especially when you want to say the simplest things and give an ordinary order. You find you cannot say it.¹⁷

However, the sisters soon settled into their routine. They recorded in their chronicle that outstations were visited on Wednesdays and the mode of transport could be horse, saddled in the early morning and ready for Regis after her visit to the church. Olga, the one-eyed horse, always preferred coming home to going out. She had a foal and in the afternoons would be sure to cross the bridge on which she had baulked in the morning!

Managing the primary school

The sisters took over responsibility for the parish primary school, which had opened several years earlier. This school was also the demonstration school for the teacher training college which began in the first year.

The school, which began in 1951 to cater for junior primary, is quite large. The lowest class numbers seventy-five (75), the next fifty-six (56), the next forty (40) and the last fifty (50), but each day more and more pupils come. The good news seems to be spreading.

Boys who showed promise of better things were selected for Kairiru, and later to Burui which became a boarding school for boys. Very few girls progressed beyond Grade Three. A few girls later went to Wirui, then some went to the High School at Torembi, and later on to Yarapos and Kaindi.

There were boys boarding at one side of the station and girls at the other side, the boys always outnumbering the girls. This was, and continued to be the pattern. Women and girls were looked upon as being inferior and much pressure was needed to persuade the papas to send the girls to school, especially when school fees began to be expected.¹⁸

The education of girls

Sister Bridie Fennessy recalled how difficult it was to get the pupils, who were all boys, to perform in front of others. The very first time was at a concert attended by a small gathering of priests and held in honour of Bishop Arkfeld. The clergy suggested the public should see the children when they had their *singsings*¹⁹ on the airstrip at Christmas time. This was arranged and the people were impressed, especially with the little ones. Seeing what the children could do, the catechist Joseph Langu agreed to send his little daughter Anastasia as a boarder and she brought a friend along with her. After that the people were more willing to send their girls to school.

Gradually the people's resistance to sending their girls to school began to change. Mother Regis made a constant plea that, where possible, clans would send an equal number of boys and girls for enrolment. The message would go round the villages: One boy, one girl!



Sister Bridie and class.

Our first Christmas night in Kunjingini

Sister Val Cervetto recalls the wonder of Christmas in Kunjingini.

On 24th December 1957, people started to arrive at the mission station about 5 pm for midnight Mass. They sat around on the ground in groups, talking quietly and feeding their children. As it got dark they lit their lamps. Lights could also be seen through the trees as more people wended their way up to the station. As midnight approached, it was a wonderful sight to see hundreds of people sitting around their lighted lamps. When Father Blasig rang the bell for Mass they all stood, gathered up their sleeping children and processed towards the church door. Father Blasig had a strong singing voice and as he intoned the Hymn 'Yumi go long Bethlem ples nau, yumi lukim Jesus' (Let's go to Bethlehem now, to see Jesus') with one voice the crowd took it up. I thought they would raise the roof off the church. Even to this day I can feel that emotion when I think of our first Christmas night in Kunjingini. A most wonderful experience!²⁰

Val's story reflects the experience of many sisters who attended liturgies for the first time in bush churches in the Sepik area. Allowing for cultural differences in other parts of PNG, the sisters attending liturgies in earlier times were similarly drawn into a world of wonder and awe.

Experience of pioneering days: Sister Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy

As one of the first sisters from the Brisbane Mercy Congregation to go to the Papua New Guinea mission, I worked in Kunjingini as a Primary School Teacher from 1957 until the year of independence 1975. At that time (1957), many of the people felt school should be for the young and not so young men, not for the youngsters, especially females. It took a lot of visits to villages, a lot of talking with parents, trying to persuade them to entrust their little ones to us. So it was a significant step forward when enough children of appropriate age occupied Grades 1, 2 and 3.²¹

When Bridie left PNG in 1975, after independence was granted and all primary schools had to be localised, girls had reached a high level of education and were interested in becoming teachers. Teaching was not only for men! The young women went on to the Training College at Kaindi, which had become co-educational under the administration of the Christian Brothers and Mercy Sisters.

One of the most memorable moments for me was when I attended the first Mass in the bush church with its dirt floor and kneelers that served both as kneelers and seats for men and women – the women on one side of the church and the men on the other. Then there was the day of the school sports – the 'green' team refused to march because they came last! These children were remarkable in many ways, they could hear the mission plane coming long before I could and tell me whether it was the Dornier or the Cessna and whether it was coming to Kunjingini or going on to the next station, Kaugia. Then there was the afternoon when the class as one rushed out of the room and urged me to come too. The reason, an earth tremor, guria²² they called it.

I soon realised how strong the links that were being forged between the Mercies at home in Brisbane and ourselves. We depended on them and their schools for so much. The children of Kunjingini had no conception of many things that we take so much for granted. We spent a lot of time making charts with pictures cut out from magazines. Then there was the question of some kind of uniforms for special occasions, e.g. visits of Mother Damian and Bishop Rush of Rockhampton. Our parish priest then was Father Peter Green, on loan from the Rockhampton Diocese. Sewing circles formed among the parents of Mercy school children in Brisbane came to our rescue. Thus the Kunjingini children, boys and girls wore brightly coloured lap laps²³ for school and special ones for occasions. We managed to get shorts for the boys as well as the lap laps.

Under the sisters' administration, Kunjingini Primary School was eventually to become a very large central school. The number of teachers increased as more sisters, lay missionaries and national teachers joined the staff. Among the PALMS lay missionaries who came for two-year terms, were Doris Zarb, Margaret Bolger, Patricia Cook and Pamela Smith.²⁴

Nursing care

Sister Isobel, who had served as an army nurse during the war, knew what basic health care services were needed and soon settled into the tropical scene. She went out for clinic work on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and was kept busy with mothers and patients from the nearby villages, and with the hospital work. People came in large numbers from as far away

as Kaugia for treatment.

Isobel realised that facilities needed to be improved, and she added her plan for a permanent maternity hospital to the list of buildings going up on the station. Sister Cephas reports on its progress in a letter:

The new building program in Kunjingini is quite full. Our big concern at the moment is the new maternity hospital. It is being built with concrete blocks made here on the station. The blocks are made down near the river where the water is at hand, but they have to be carried up quite a big hill to the site of the hospital. The outer walls have reached seven feet now, and the structure is beginning to look very fine. It is two hundred and fifty paces by the shortest route from our Convent, so it looks as if Sister Mary Isobel will need a bicycle to make her daily journeys. It is hoped that the new church, which is the next project, will be built in cement blocks too.²⁵

The Rosary Sisters – constant companions

The Rosary Sisters joined the Mercy Sisters in their ministries of health and education. Sister Cephas' account of this cross-cultural ministry:

Three Rosary Sisters have joined us this year. Less than ten years ago the little congregation was founded. It is an inspiration to see the way the sisters go about their duties. They work with us here on the station and accompany us on the visitation and on our journeys to the outstations. Later it is hoped that a larger group will come to do their training as teachers. Sister Margarithis, Rosary Sister, who is a nurse is a great help to Sister Mary Isobel. Sister Aloysia teaches in school. Sister Ludwina helps Sister Mary Philip. The sisters are a credit to Sister Eurista the Holy Spirit Sister who has trained them.

Beginning of teacher education in the Wewak Diocese



Sister Margarita's teacher trainees at Kunjingini.

The first teacher education centre in the Wewak Diocese began at Kunjingini under the competent and practical administration of the qualified and experienced teacher and pharmacist, Sister Margarita Shannon. Beginning with just ten student teachers, enrolment increased until the number of students almost outgrew the limited facilities available. Margarita provides a report on the beginning and development.²⁶

Beginnings: The Bishop came last Thursday and unexpectedly left behind five teacher trainees. The next day he dropped off another two and three more are still to arrive. They are walking from their own villages... The ten boys have finished their sixth standard, and therefore are able to speak English fairly well and that is a big help to us.

Getting established: This was the beginning of teacher education in the East Sepik. The first small teacher training building, which was built the following year by the parish priest, Father Blasig, was replaced by a more spacious building, made of materials gathered from the bush. Over the years, enrolments grew. Students came from all over the diocese... in the small mission planes, and then eventually they came from the dioceses of Aitape, Vaimo and Daru. They were all men at first, and they did a one-year "A" Grade course which qualified them to teach in the lower primary classes.

Standards and upgrading in accord with government requirements: For many years the Inspector-Examiner was Mr Bill Magnay and he did much to raise the level of Teacher Education... It was at his instigation that, one year, there were no pre-service students taken, and the whole year was spent on in-service, as graduates from the previous ten years were brought back in three groups and given a term of up-dating, and education in the New Maths. Another year (1962) we had a group of Rosary Sisters in the College, and during this time Sister Carthage helped the Rosary Sisters while I was on leave. No men were enrolled that year. Instead they went to St Xavier's Kairiru where Brother Canute taught them. Pam Quartermaine from the Teacher Education Division in Port Moresby came from time to time and was very supportive of our program.

At Kunjingini, demonstration lessons were given every week and sisters teaching the lower grades assisted in the supervision of the weekly practice teaching lessons.

Teaching practice in the Diocese: When the Continuous Teaching Practice was on, all travel was by air, as there was no road to Kunjingini at the time. The small mission planes flew in and out, taking students to Ulupu, Torembi, Yangoru, Negrie – wherever there were teachers qualified to supervise them.

Students' flights to their own places: As the year drew to a close, the thought of home was uppermost in all minds. The anticipation of reunion with one's family however, was often tinged with a little sadness, as Aitape, Vaimo and Daru planes circled overhead, waving a last goodbye to friends one might not see again.

St Benedict's Teachers College, Kunjingini: As the years passed, the staff grew from one to three, to cope with the increasing enrolments. The new staff members were Sister Regina Mary O'Keeffe (1965) and Father Don Grant (1968) and permanent buildings were erected. At this stage it was decided to give a fitting name to the complex and it became St Benedict's.

Decision to transfer teacher education to Wewak

By 1968, when there were 44 students, facilities at Kunjingini were no longer adequate for the teacher education needs of the diocese. Catholic high schools had been established at Yrapos (Sisters of Mercy for girls) and St Xavier's, Kairiru (Marist Brothers for boys). The secondary graduates of these schools were qualified for entry into a higher level of teacher training – a new two-year course offering a full primary certificate. At the beginning of 1969, St Benedict's Kunjingini, in a merger between the Sisters of Mercy with the Christian Brothers, was transferred to Kaindi (Wewak) where it became known as St Benedict's Teachers College.

The ministry of hospitality

In 1957, Sister Val Cervetto had taken on domestic management of the convent when there was only an outdoor kitchen, consisting of a roof, but no walls. Using a tiny wood stove, she learnt to make what the sisters called 'perfect bread'. Soon Val and the girls she trained catered for the large mission station community. Kunjingini became well known as a centre for hospitality among the priests of the area, who often went back to their remote bush stations with some homemade bread, biscuits and cakes, besides the routine mail and store goods. They also returned home supplied with clean, ironed church linen. Since those days, the former domestic girls have used their skills as wives and mothers, and many have found employment in centres far from the humble kitchen beginnings at Kunjingini. Thus, Sister Val transplanted a Mercy tradition of hospitality, one that resonated well with the Melanesian value of hospitality.

Kunjingini remained the central house of the Mercy Sisters until Kaindi was established. As the roads increased, the use of the airstrips – so absolutely essential in the early days of the missions in Kunjingini, Torembi, Ulupu and Kairiru – grew less and less. The Kunjingini Mission became a half-way house for priests and sisters en route to the mission stations within the Maprik Deanery and beyond to Burui and Pagui en route to the Sepik, as well as Tau, Dreikir, Aresili, and Yassip, and even Ningil in the West Sepik Province.

New ministries in the 70s and 80s

As localisation was effected in the primary schools, the sisters took the initiative in responding to emerging needs. Encouraged by the Bishop, they embarked on new ministries.

Vocational Education. In the early 1970s, Sister Mary Scanlan and Brother Terrence Kane FMS established a vocational school ²⁷ for those students unable to proceed to high school.

Maprik High School Teaching. In the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the sisters took responsibility for teaching high school subjects and Religious Education at the Maprik Administration High School. Sister Marie Williams from Negrie began this work in 1975. When she commenced pastoral work at Tangugo Pastoral Centre, the Kunjingini sisters continued this ministry with Sister Madeleine O'Dea and Brother Malcolm Hall of the Marist Brothers.

The Cluster System in Teacher Education. During this time, a 'cluster' system of supervision of the Kaindi teacher trainees was introduced. This was a teacher education innovation in which students were transported to the network of rural primary schools in the various areas of the plains - Kunjingini, mountains - Yangoru, and coast - Dagua. The students

were accommodated and supervised on a daily basis by St Benedict's lecturing staff. Sisters, by their ingenuity and sheer physical effort and determination, made this remarkable system work. For 11 years, diminutive Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer was engaged in this demanding role of living in remote areas for three of the four terms in the year, caring for the welfare of approximately 13 students, and encouraging, instructing and evaluating them in their practice teaching. Sisters Desma Clarke and Irene Masterson were also involved for several years in an organisational and management role within the cluster system at Yangoru. Sister Dominique Coles SSpS managed the supervision of the Dagua area.

Continuing health care at Kunjingini

A continuous line of qualified sister nurses succeeded Sister Isobel Condon. They included Sisters Jacinta Wiedman, Jill Stringer, Anne McDonnell, Julie Anne Ryan, Terry Gongi, Sophie Samiak, Claudia Apalenda, Sebastina Yangin, Margaret Roni and Philomena Waira.

According to a 1986 positions vacant advertisement requesting recruits from Australia for Kunjingini, there was an urgent need for a charge nurse of the outpatient and maternal and child welfare clinic. The advertisement said that each month 1,500 children (0-5 years) were enrolled and 3,500-4,500 outpatients treated. It went on to say that the area covered 20 square kilometres, with a population of 12, 051, and that Kunjingini was 20 kilometres from the nearest hospital at Maprik.²⁸

Significant reasons were given for this request. Kunjingini was a disadvantaged and economically poor area where health services were essential. A sister nurse would be an invaluable support for the national staff at Kunjingini, and contribute toward their professional development. Kunjingini was seen as a base for Mercy national sisters, as there were opportunities for ministry in the community school, clinic, parish and diocese.

The advertisement reflected a transition stage when expatriate sisters were needed to take charge of the health sub-centre and assist in the ongoing development of the young national staff and sisters. Although Kunjingini was classed as a sub-centre, there was always plenty of work to do.

Kunjingini was the overall responsibility of the Catholic Health Services Agency based in the Wewak Diocese. In recent years, the position of Central Manager has been in the capable hands of a Rosary Sister, Sister Celine.

The sister nurses' experiences

Sister Julie Anne Ryan, who was Officer in Charge of Kunjingini, explained that the nurses worked long hours at the clinic because patients with injuries from fights and snake bites would come for treatment late in the day. Consequently, the outpatient work usually continued until dusk. Furthermore, as Kunjingini was a big area it took about two months to attend all the maternal and child health areas, and that meant at least four days a week attending these clinics. When the sisters had to drive or walk to places there were inadequate facilities. To give people some privacy, they would try to manage under a tree. The sisters would have to drive to Wewak to collect the medical supplies as they were never delivered to the mission.

Sister Sophie Samiak commented that Kunjingini served all the people of the Wosera Gawi

area down to the Sepik River. Although the area was supposed to be managed by Burui Health Centre, the people seeking treatment there were by-passing it and instead coming to Kunjingini because of the more reliable medication and services given. People were also coming from other areas like Maprik and Yangoru.

Sister Margaret Roni provides an account of the scope of the health services in the area:

We see many patients, not from around our catchment area only, but from other places. We treat all kinds of illnesses – malaria, pneumonia, skin diseases, sores and scabies. We see TB patients as well, and their number is increasing. There is cross-infection as some are faithful to treatment and others don't complete the treatment. The sisters go out for Maternal and Child Health Care at Kunjingini, including Gupmapil, Serangwando and Miko, and attend to night calls and births. All the nurses share responsibility, and each one takes seven days on call.²⁹

Sometimes we see one-hundred or even two-hundred patients a day. A non-government organisation (NGO) working with Save the Children Fund is helping us to train village health volunteers. These volunteers can give first aid treatment in the villages and assist as midwives in deliveries. The help of these volunteers reduces the numbers of patients who have to come into the health sub-centre or clinic. The volunteers fill in an order form for replacement of medical supplies and bring it to the clinic where we supply them. The NGO assists in obtaining the supplies for us to distribute to the volunteers.

We support these volunteers when we visit the villages for clinics and we offer in-service training for them at the health sub-centre. Their district supervisor visits them every second month to make sure they have sufficient medical supplies. I enjoy working with these volunteers.

Papua New Guinea has a high rate of HIV/AIDS. In the rural areas we have difficulty in knowing whether a patient has HIV/AIDS as the symptoms are similar to tuberculosis, recurrent malaria and diarrhoea.³⁰

National sisters settle into community life and ministry

Kunjingini was a suitable place for the formation of the national sisters through their introduction to community experience during the novitiate, or during their junior professed years. Several young sisters followed in the footsteps of the expatriate sisters in teaching and nursing. Those in teaching were Sisters Petronia Gawi, Angela Kaima, Mariska Kua and Helen Pili, while those in nursing were Sisters Terry Gongi, Sophie Samiak, Claudia Apalenda, Margaret Roni, Philomena Waira and Sebastina Yangin. Sister Theresia Nakankwien, with Ann O'Regan and Misericordia Carter as mentors, gained much experience in pastoral work.

As a primary school leaver at Kunjingini Primary school, Sister Terry Gongi responded to a request from Sister Val Cervetto to come to Kaindi for domestic training, and went on to do further studies at Mercy College, Yapos, and a Diploma in Community Health at the School of Nursing run by the Sisters of Mercy at Aitape.

Pastoral ministry

After leaving Drekikir at the end of 1992, Sister Ann O'Regan returned to the novitiate in Kaindi, but continued to do some part-time ministry in Kunjingini and at the many outstations, encouraging and training several of the national sisters. In 2002, Ann returned to Kunjingini continuing in the formation of young PNG sisters in pastoral work. Among these were Catherine Hopil and Robina Eide as postulants.

Together with the parish priest, Father Waldemar SVD, the sisters used a team approach in planning and carrying out pastoral visitation, parish and village retreats in accordance with the pastoral vision of the diocese contained in the 'New Image of the Parish' (NIP). There was also a strong link through participation in the Maprik Deanery. One of the national sisters, Catherine Jambet, engaged in full-time pastoral ministry after successfully completing her Diploma in Religious Studies at Divine Word University, Madang.

Protesting against violence

There have been hardships for the people and the sisters. With the escalation of violence against women in the Maprik area and in the Province, and urged by Sister Ann O'Regan, Father Otto Separi wrote a public letter of protest in 2000. Parts of this letter, written 'in the name of the priests and deacons of the Maprik Deanery', are quoted here:

We are extremely offended, hurt and diminished, when we see, encounter, or hear of women being maltreated by men, culture or society in any way.

We are particularly disturbed by incidences of rape, especially gang rape, even in our own District and Province. We are disturbed by violence against women, whether it be physical, verbal or emotional. We are disturbed when justice is not seen to be done to women in cases of rape, where the male assailant is often given an insignificant sentence in relation to the damage done to the woman, mentally, emotionally and physically.

We ask our brothers to recognise the dignity of women, which is given to them by God.

Otto Separi¹

Reflections on the early days at Kunjingini

Hilda Yangele, a novice at the novitiate at Coolock House in Goroka in 2005 is from the village of Mul, in the Kunjingini Parish. She recalls stories of the early days as remembered in the village:

My mother whose name is Grace told me the stories of the Mercy Sisters who came to Kunjingini in 1957. Father Paul Blasig was the parish priest there and he gave his house, which the people had built, to the sisters. My mother and lots of my uncles and my father Hubert Yangele went to school there. Two of my uncles, Mr Alois Petau, who is now Headmaster at Kunjingini and Mr Leonard Kiminja who was the principal of Kaindi Teachers College, were also taught by the sisters.

At that time the Wosera area of Kaugia in the north and Kunjingini in the south was a very densely populated area, but there were hardly any schools. Many people came and got their education in Kunjingini. The sisters were very strict with the students with their education and they wanted them to be at school and learn things, and later they

could go and look for jobs. During the weekdays the sisters told them not to go home and visit their families, they wanted them to stay at school, but they allowed them to go home for the weekends. My father told me the story that the sisters were very good to them and taught them many good things, to be a good Christian. My father completed Grade Four and he was selected to go to St Xavier's and he completed his Grade Six there on Kairiru Island.

After some time a permanent building was made for the sisters and they left the bush material building. Some years after that another building was made, which is the present convent.

In the early days, when the sisters wanted to go to the villages on the other side of the River, called Amaku, Father Blasig built them a raft. The people who were there to help them were my uncles and grandparents. So they would bring the raft to one side of the river, and the sisters would put their things like teaching materials and medical supplies on it as the boys got ready to steer the raft. Then they would hold the raft with one hand and with the other hand, they would swim across. The sisters would go on to the other villages and teach the women and the children and the nurses would treat the sick people. When they came back they would find the people there who could carry them to the other side of the river. They would help the sisters carry their things and walk with them to the convent.



My mother told me that the main sicknesses in that area were malnutrition and malaria. There were lots of people there and we had no land to grow crops and benefit from the food from the gardens. Sago is our main diet. The sisters helped by telling them to eat a lot of greens, like beans, for vitamins, to give them good blood, to eat the sago grubs for protein. They taught them to take care of their homes, to look after their own bodies like washing and hygiene to keep germs away, and sewing lessons with the women using their hands. They took the older people who had never been to school for literacy classes in Tok Pisin. Some of the older people taught the sisters about our language too.³²

Alois Petau, the Headmaster of Kunjingini Primary School in 2005, recalled his experiences as a student in the mid-1960s, and the stories of his father, who was the first catechist in the Kunjingini Parish some five years before the sisters came. Alois began by recalling the names of the pioneer sisters – names that rolled swiftly off his tongue:

Mother Regis, Marietta, Brendan, Carthage, Val, Cephas, who knew the Tok Ples (vernacular) and Isobel, 'the No.1 Meri bilong station clinic and who also knew the Tok Ples.' Mother Brendan ruled the school area to the left and Sister Isobel ruled the area near the convent and hospital to the right.

The Mercy Sisters did a lot. Besides teaching the students who came from as far away as Dreikir, Wewak, Ambunti, Yangoru and Angoram they took in orphans, children with grille and skin diseases. They provided students with uniforms and shorts to wear.

The sisters planted the first fruit trees. Sister de Padua took the ex-Grade Six students who were not selected for high school and taught them life skills in the Skul Anchor. Kunjingini was a thriving place with the trade store, PMVs (local bus service), and the piggery and poultry farm. The buildings and iron roofs all came through the sisters from Australia.

Sister Isobel started with the school clinic, and this developed into the sub-health centre for students, workers, village people and the Australian soldiers doing research work. Sister Val taught us how to read notes, how to cook and to sew. Many of the ex-students are now in charge of many government departments.³²

The ministry of the national sisters today

With the development of local leadership, the Church has entered a new phase of mission. The national sisters possess great cultural sensitivity and understanding. In their pastoral and spiritual roles, they are able to identify closely with the people. As well as taking on positions of responsibility for service, the sisters carry out effective team roles working alongside their fellow country women and men. With their religious and professional training and experience, they courageously engage in the task of inculturation – the day-to-day dynamic of living of Gospel values within the culture. Theirs is an influential ministry in today's society when poverty abounds in the rural areas, no less than in the towns.

Law and order problems magnify the situation where there has been breakdown in traditional life and values and the growing threat and reality of HIV/AIDS. The national sisters stand by the women and children who are often the ones to suffer most in times of social upheaval. Kunjingini was the first rural mission founded by seven Australian Sisters of Mercy in 1957. Almost 50 years later, the mercy ministry is being carried on by two PNG Sisters of Mercy. Vero Lokalyo from the Highlands, is a trained catechist, experienced pastoral worker and HIV/AIDS counsellor, while Philomena Waira is a young graduate of the School of Nursing, Lemakot, New Ireland. Philomena is from the remote area of Kaugia within the Wosera District in the Wosera Gawi electorate.

The difficulty of accessing services in rural areas is exemplified in the case of Kunjingini. The sisters' ancient refrigerator and gas oven have broken down and they have to wait for the spare parts and the labour to replace them. Apart from the government vehicle for health patrols, the only regular transport available to the sisters for getting supplies from Wewak is the local bus service (PMV). Meanwhile, this did not stop Sister Vero from cheerfully managing the cooking outdoors like the village people around them. Nor did it prevent a wonderful sense of hospitality being exercised by the sisters. Vero also organised the growing of vanilla beans as a small cash crop industry.

A continuing presence of the Sisters of Mercy at Kunjingini

The Sisters of Mercy have maintained a Mercy presence at Kunjingini for 50 years (1957-2007). Their ministries have developed and changed over the years and include ministries of primary education, supervision of teachers, teacher education, health, hospitality, visitation, supervision of practice teaching, vocational training, pastoral work and Bible school. As lay people have taken over responsibilities for education and health, and claimed their role as

'being the Church', the sisters' roles have changed. It is the national sisters who interpret today's changing needs among their own people and respond with their Mercy call.

Two founding sisters return to Kunjingini

In the 1980s, two of the original founders who had departed to set up Kaindi in 1969, returned to Kunjingini almost 30 years later³⁴. The buildings of the original teacher training centre had been renovated and were to be used for a diocesan Bible Centre, with Sister Margarita in charge. When the main structure and walls of the sisters' convent were found to be white-ant ridden behind the outward shell of paint, there was general alarm. Sister Val was the obvious one to guide the restoration and replacement of timber, and also to plan and supervise the building of a new kitchen and storeroom. Within a few years, these tasks were accomplished and the time for the sisters' departure came round. The men, women and children of the whole parish were not going to let them go unhonoured and organised a formal farewell Mass and *singsing*³⁵ celebrations!³⁶

Sister Margarita recalls the joyful celebrations organised by the parish to bid farewell to Sister Val Cervetto and herself. These two sisters were among the seven pioneers who had come to Kunjingini, 34 years before, in 1957.

As part of the celebrations, including Mass in the big church, it was time for the singsings. Each group had its own distinctive headdress, decorated with bird of paradise, cassowary and other feathers. Pieces of brightly coloured crotons were attached to arms and legs, and faces were painted in traditional designs. As the evening grew into night, the kundu drummers with their steady beat and accompanying songs and dances, continued. They explained that this was their expression of appreciation of what many Sisters of Mercy had been doing in their midst, over a period of 34 years.³⁷

A missioning from Kunjingini to Australia

Margarita continues:

The song that touched us most, however, was the processional song of the village leaders:

*Before you came we had nothing,
And our parents and grandparents had nothing.
You brought us books and pencils and gave us education.
You looked after us when we were sick,
And you looked after our children.
Now you are going home,
And we are taking your place.*

Margarita reflects that it was a missioning ceremony of another kind. "We were being missioned home! The people saw themselves with the mission call to take our place!"³⁸

A special gift from the parish women

Celebrations to mark the 50 years of Kunjingini Parish (1951-2001) were a joyous testimony of the faith of the people. Men, women and children gathered from across the parish to worship in liturgy and celebrate in *singsings* in an area marked out on the old airstrip. The contribution of the sisters for most of the period (1957-2001) was specially remembered and the solemnity of the occasion heightened by the visit of some early sisters from Australia – Sisters Bridie Fennessy, Joan Hooper and the long-serving Val Cervetto.

One particularly remarkable process of formal recognition of the sisters' contribution, in the best women's tradition of Melanesian protocol, cannot go unrecorded. One of the women's groups performed a dance, progressively and rhythmically moving forward, with a gift of a special carving held aloft. As they approached it could be seen to be an elaborate Sepik carving, with a decorative battery clock face set in the centre – a gift for the sisters. Once in front of the formal gathering, the woman handed the precious gift to the two main celebrants for them to give to the sisters. This was dutifully done and in full view of everybody. It was then handed over to Sister Val. Appreciating the significance of this recognition by the parish women of the work of the sisters among them, Val later passed it on to the PNG Leader, Sister Helen O'Brien, to be placed in the administration centre at McAuley House in Mount Hagen.

Touched by the gentle ceremonial exchange of the women, one of the sisters later asked some people in the *singsing* crowd about it. The answer was a straightforward one. The sisters had brought education to their children, looked after their families when they were sick, and taught them healthy ways to look after themselves and their families. Some veteran missionaries confirmed that the Wosera people of the area had vastly and visibly improved in health and mental and physical stamina over two generations of the sisters' influence there.³⁹

Endnotes

- ¹ Photo taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ² Notes from Geoff Brumm SVD (SVD Historian, Wewak) and Mihalik, F., SVD. *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*, Madang, DWU Press, 1998.
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ Photo taken from Fincutter, P., SVD, *Can you ride a bicycle: The flying days and deeds of Archbishop Leo Arkfeld SVD, the Flying Bishop*, Wirui Press, Wewak, 1999.
- ⁵ Taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁶ The first paragraph is reconstructed from available information, and the second paragraph is taken from Bishop Arkfeld's Letter in the Archives of Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁷ Mother Damian's thoughts are a reconstruction by the author after consideration of documents and letters from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁹ As reported in the Brisbane weekly paper, *The Catholic Leader* (undated) kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.
- ¹⁰ Men with administrative authority in the village during colonial times.
- ¹¹ Excerpt from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kunjingini.
- ¹² A root vegetable, commonly known as 'yam'.
- ¹³ Young bamboo shoots, cooked and eaten as a vegetable.
- ¹⁴ Excerpts taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kunjingini.
- ¹⁵ The generosity of the teachers, school children and lay people is to be noted.
- ¹⁶ *Tok Pisin* was widely spoken in the coastal areas.
- ¹⁷ Early letter of Mother Francis Regis, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ¹⁸ Excerpts taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kunjingini, 1962.
- ¹⁹ Traditional dancing within the clan to the beat of drums.
- ²⁰ Taken from an account written by Sister Val Cervetto kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ²¹ Account written by Sister Bridie Fennessy and kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ²² An earth tremor, earth quake.
- ²³ Cloth wrapped round the waist, used as a uniform.
- ²⁴ The Australian lay missionary organization.
- ²⁵ This and the report below was written by Sister Cephias Philben, and kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ²⁶ This historic account is taken from a report written by Sister Margarita Shannon, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ²⁷ This was known at the time as Skul-Ankor.
- ²⁸ In the *Mercy News* (1986) – the National Leader's general communication to the Sisters of Mercy PNG.
- ²⁹ Offered in a conversation by Sister Margaret Roni in June, 2007.
- ³⁰ Taken from a report in *Listen, Journal of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia* Vol. 24, No.2, 2006.
- ³¹ Addressed to the editor of *The Independent* newspaper.
- ³² Offered in an interview in May 2005.
- ³³ *ibid.*
- ³⁴ Sister Margarita returned in 1987, and Sister Val in 1989. Both stayed till the end of 1990, leaving in 1991.
- ³⁵ Cultural dance to the beat of the drum.
- ³⁶ This celebration was held at Kunjingini on November 16, 1990.
- ³⁷ Excerpts taken from a report of Sister Margarita Shannon in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ³⁸ Excerpts taken from Sister Margarita's written recollections of the farewell, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ³⁹ In a conversation with Fathers Kees van der Geest SVD and Arnold Steffen SVD in Mount Hagen, May, 2006.



KUNJINGINI (1957-2006)

Founding Community

Francis Regis Everingham (Superior), Isobel Condon,
Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy, Val (Philip) Cervetto,
Margarita Shannon, Marietta Riedy, Cephas Philben

Claudia Apalenda	RoseMary Baker	Val Birchley
Joseph Xavier Byrne	Irene Callanan	Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll
Valda (Philip) Cervetto	Isobel Condon	Brendan Daly
Madeleine O'Dea	Josefina Dooley	Francis Regis Everingham
Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy	Petronia Gawi	Theresia Gongi
Maureen Grant	Joan (Chrysostom) Hooper	Catherine Jambet
Angela Kaima	Mariska Kua	Veronica Lokalyo
Joan MacGinley	Anne MacDonnell	Mary Nambakwen
Mary (Regina) O'Keeffe	Ann O'Regan	Maura O'Shaughnessy
Cephas Philben	Helen Pili	Maria Jean Rhule
Marietta Riedy	Margaret Roni	Julie Anne Ryan
Sophie Samiak	Mary (de Padua) Scanlan	Margaret Scroope
Margarita Shannon	Mary Stallard	Jill (Raymond) Stringer
Theodora Talili	Philomena Waira	Jacinta Wiedman
Beverly Whitton	Sebastina Yangin	

Ministries

Primary and High School Teaching, Religious Education, Health Care and MCH Patrols,
Pastoral Work, Visitation, Hospitality, HIV/AIDS Awareness.

Maprik High School from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s

Leonie Williams	Madeleine O'Dea	Maura O'Shaughnessy
Margaret Scroope	Mary Stallard	Beverly Whitton

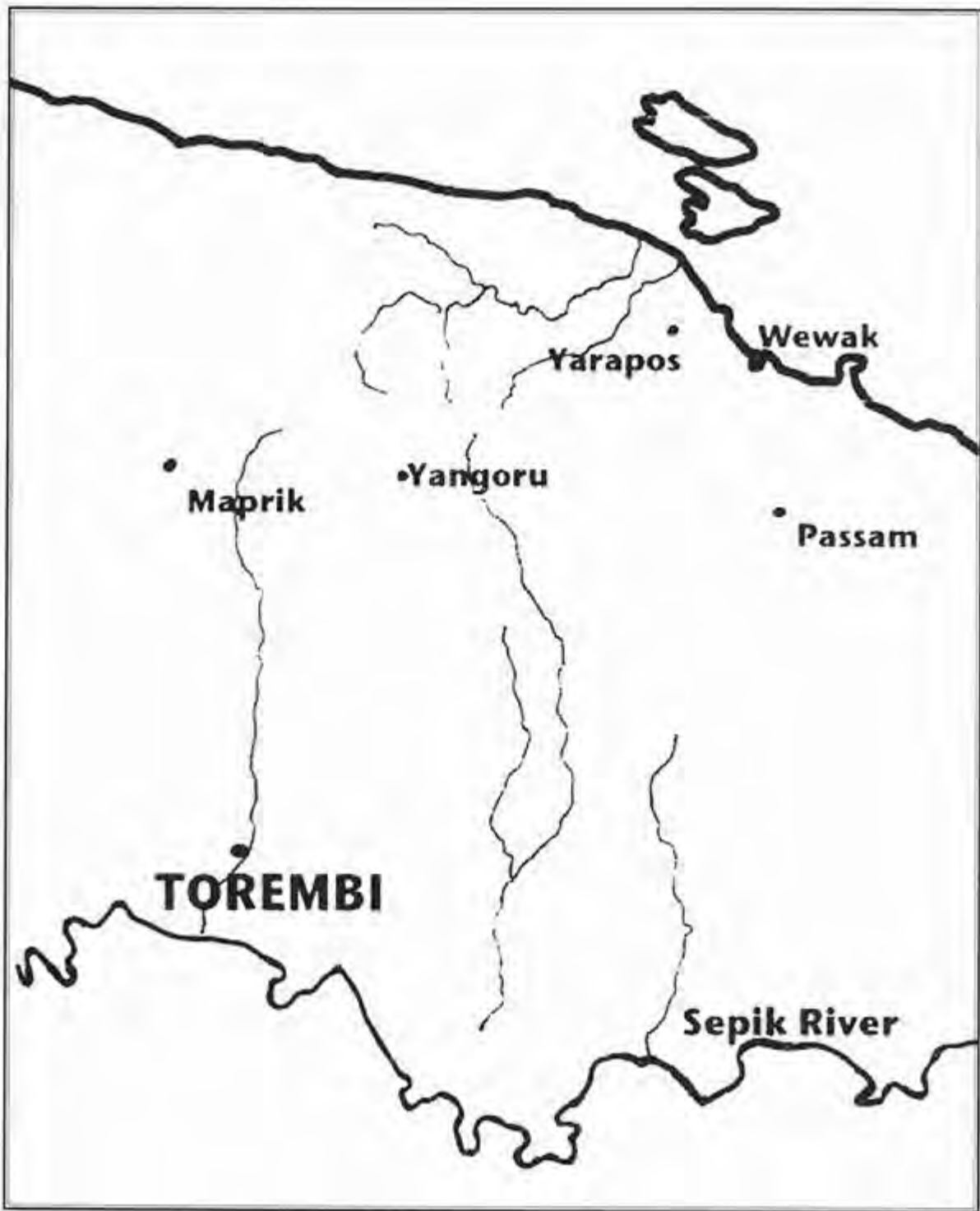
National sisters in ministries of teaching, nursing, pastoral work and AIDS awareness:

Claudia Apalenda	Petronia Gawi	Theresia Gongi
Catherine Jambet	Mariska Kua	Veronica Lokalyo
Margaret Roni	Sophie Samiak	Philomena Waira



QUEENSLAND AND GRAFTON SISTERS TO THE SEPIK SWAMPLANDS OF TOREMBI (1958-1974)

Bishop Arkfeld's second request for Mercy missionaries in the Wewak Diocese was the Torembi Parish, in an environment of jungle and swamplands. The map shows that Torembi is very close to the Sepik River, one of the longest rivers in the world, winding and coiling 700 miles through jungles and swamps. It can rise several feet and flood the villages along its banks.¹



In order to answer this request and make up the numbers for a foundation, Mother Damian Duncombe sought assistance from the Federation congregations. She also saw this as an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of the Federation. The congregations of Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton in Queensland and Grafton in northern New South Wales responded, and the first inter-congregational community of the Federation Sisters in New Guinea was formed.

The pioneer sisters formed a contingent of four teachers and one nurse - Sister Joseph Xavier Byrne (Superior), (Brisbane), Annunziata McNamara (Townsville), Therese (Vincent) Kelly (Grafton), Elva (Gertrude) Russell (Cairns) and Mary (Felix) Wildie (Rockhampton). The presentation of mission crosses was at St Stephen's Cathedral, on January 26, 1958² and the sisters arrived at Torembo on March 6, 1958.³



Sisters Mary (Felix) Wildie, Therese (Vincent) Kelly, Joseph Xavier Byrne(Superior),
Gertrude (Elva) Russell, and Annunziata McNamara.

Arrival in Torembe

The sisters' arrival in 1958 and first impressions were recorded and have been adapted here from early reports in the sisters' Torembe chronicle.

We were flown by Bishop Leo Arkfeld in the mission plane to the station, landing on the long, hard airstrip, which was the only way in and out at the time. We were welcomed by Father Franz Grubinger. We soon got to know the uniqueness of the environment, and the isolation it caused. Our Mission Station of Torembe lies south-west of Wewak in the swamplands of the Sepik River. It is approximately 120 miles from Wewak, but it is very isolated as there is no road. The population of 4,000 live in the twenty-five villages in the area. The station is built on kunai land surrounded by sago swamps, and is especially noted, not for its scenic beauty, although it has a peace and a beauty of its own, but for its isolation and mosquitoes. It is a very compact station being built on either side of the airstrip. At times the rain and mud is very depressing but as we depend on a few drums for water we must bless the Lord for the showers.⁴

Ministries of teaching and nursing



Early classrooms, Torembe.

The sisters soon commenced the ministries of teaching and nursing. There were 177 children in the school, most of whom had some two hours' walk to and fro each day. The second year they took in boarders, both boys and girls. Soon there were 80 girl boarders and 40 boy boarders. Four years later, a letter by Father Grubinger SVD states that there were 420 children on the roll.⁵

Sister Mary Wildie, who set up a clinic a short distance from the convent, records the experience of pioneering health work in Torembe:



Sister Mary Wildie's Clinic.

There was an established aid post and the Docta boi⁶ Nicholas, was a great assistance to me, especially as my interpreter until my knowledge of Pidgin improved and I became more familiar with Pidgin. After twelve months he was later transferred to Ambunti and I was on my own as the subsidy was paid to the mission for my services.

Maternal and Child Health Clinics (MCH) were set up in the villages and I, in the company of Father's haus-boi,

would walk to the villages for clinics and this would entail walking through the kunai grass well above my head, negotiating log crossings over rivers and canoe rides through swamps to reach my destination. Oh! to be young again and so trusting! I had no fear for my safety and trusted the New Guineans assisting me completely. They were happy days despite the extreme heat, mosquitoes and isolation.⁷

The sisters' convent

The sisters' accommodation was a large building which had been erected by Father Raymond Kalisz SVD, designer and builder. The village people provided the workmanship and the supply of bush materials needed for this spacious dwelling for the sisters.

Sister Therese Kelly describes the convent in one of her letters:

The building is of native materials - walls of pangal, roof, marota, floors, limbum.⁸ The floors are really exciting, they spring under the feet and writing is almost impossible when anyone walks as the whole place shakes. The bedrooms and dining room are mosquito proof - the Sepik is famous for natnat (mosquitoes) so we at least sleep and eat in peace. The people are really wonderful and have gone to endless trouble to build us a nice house. As yet we have no chapel - but it is in the making.⁹

It was a ten minute walk down the airstrip to the church, and the sisters soon learnt to manage this distance on bicycles - the more adept ones being able to pat the dog as they sped along the flat surface at the edge of the airstrip!

Challenges and hardships

Clad in their long, white, pleated habit, with covered headdress and veil, which was the regular religious attire of the time, sisters faced the ordeals of tropical and swamp conditions, particularly the dreadful heat, the squadrons of mosquitoes and the isolation (which they felt more keenly as the mission station was isolated from the scattered and remote villages). Therese Kelly described their efforts to eradicate the mosquitoes: "The mosquitoes were atrocious - the kunai country always had a lot of mosquitoes. In one swipe of the hand over the arm you would kill 20 or 30 at once!"¹⁰

Besides the newness and strangeness of the surroundings, the sisters faced new adjustments in community and



New Torembe Church.

ministry. Leaving the close companionship of the sisters of their home communities behind, sisters started out mostly as strangers, gradually getting to know one another as they followed the hallowed schedule of religious life practised in pre-Vatican II times and worked together finding their way in ministry. Besides teaching the school children, there were big classes for communion and confirmation. A new church was being planned. Sister Elva explained how the school children helped.

The school children brought in the timber for the church. They had carried it from Korogo on the Sepik. The boat would come up from Wewak, to the mouth of the Sepik. Father had a pedal wireless and when he heard a boat was due in, the top grades would all go out to the river with some men and carry the iron and everything. The men had cut the big posts in the bush.¹¹

Little did Elva know that her own brother, Father Tom Russell SVD would serve as parish priest of Torembe in that church a few years later.

The sisters had to overcome their fear of crossing over the precarious bridges to reach the village people. Their first successful bridge crossing is recorded.

In visiting the villages we had to cross our first native bridge, a huge tree trunk about 20 ft. above a muddy river. Joanna encouraged me and led me by the hand safely across.¹²

Within a few short years, tropical sickness befell two of the sisters (Annunziata and Vincent) and they were replaced by Joan (Chrysostom) Hooper and Shirley (William) Myers, sisters from the Brisbane Congregation.

Attempts to adapt to the culture

The sisters enjoyed teaching the children and had positive relationships with the people but experienced the culture as strange and elusive. From time to time the priest and the *luluais*¹³ would come to enlighten the sisters about cultural traditions. Other national people who worked closely with the sisters on the station, the domestic girls in particular, would do this more directly and sometimes playfully, but no less effectively, as mistakes occurred in the day-to-day carrying out of duties. One of the early sisters recalls: "Mother Damian has stressed we had to be aware of their own culture and not downgrade it as it was their culture and sacred to them."¹⁴

The convent collapses

One afternoon, suddenly and without warning, the bush convent building was shaken to its foundations by a freak wind and collapsed while the sisters were at prayer in the chapel. There was huge relief as each of the sisters emerged one by one. Though visibly shaken, they were unhurt, except for the last one who had stayed to put the sanctuary light out, and received a cutting blow from the swinging sanctuary lamp for her trouble! Fr Franz Grubinger was in a panic, but the sisters were alive, and amazingly no other building was damaged. There and then, Father gave his house to the sisters and stayed in the recently built maternity hospital, until he managed to build a new convent.



The Torembe convent collapsed in 1960.



Sisters' new convent, Torembe.

The new convent

Father Grubinger lost no time in arranging for a properly constructed convent to be built by Brother Michael SVD. Every bit of timber and cement was carried in from Korogo on the Sepik to Torembe on the shoulders of the people. In fact, Sister Mary Wildie emphasised that the entire mission complex was carried in by the people. They did this with tremendous energy and good will, the men carrying the heavy timbers and the school children the lighter planks.

When returning to Wewak for the fifty years' celebrations, Mary was told by the people from Torembe who now live at Tangugo, that the original timber dormitories were being used as wards by the health services. At Torembe indigenous nurses were continuing the clinical services begun by the Sisters of Mercy and were carrying out the MCH patrols in the surrounding bush areas.¹⁵

Supporting and learning from the Rosary Sisters

Sister Madeleine Gumaure, former Mother General of the Rosary Sisters, and a retired nurse, offers her recollections of how the Sisters of Mercy supported the fledgling institute of the Rosary Sisters in the early days at Torembe. She recalls how Sister Jacinta (Mercy) and Sister Columba (Rosary) worked together in nursing, and Sisters Cephas, Margaret Rush and Maureen Grant were in the school teaching with two Rosary Sisters and assisting a group of Rosary students.¹⁶

Getting out and about

Sister Margaret Rush offers an account of the energy expended in carrying on the ministry beyond the station:

Life wasn't boring. I used to ride a bicycle – a technique you don't forget. Riding the bicycle was fairly simple. The problem was when you had to cross a river. Then you would tuck your dress up, lift your bike up and cross on the big logs over the river.

We did for a short time have the Perlie motorbikes which were rather light female bicycles. I wasn't any great hand at it, I remember coming for a buster learning how to ride them. We relied more on the bicycle. Or we would walk for miles. We were able to share in the work of Sister Jacinta, the only nurse, and we would go out to clinics and teach in the school on the outstations on Wednesday. You had your set station where you went and you were familiar with that. There was one that was far away and one that was close by that you could walk to on Sunday. Going through the mangrove swamps was an experience. If you went there in the rainy season the swamps were really flowing and the men paddled the boats, but in the normal course of events, you had just the mud flats and at such times the men poked their way through with big sticks. The only sign of a crocodile I ever saw was the head of one which looked like a log in the water. This happened when we were taking the youngsters to Ambunti for a sports day.

One Easter Monday we walked from Torembe to the Sepik, an hour and a half to two hours' walk. We travelled by outrigger canoe to Pagui, then by jeep to stay with the Kunj sisters. On our way back it began pelting with rain and we had to stay for shelter at the little village of Korogo. Because the whole place was flooded Father Grubinger sent men

out with burning torches to bring us home. They linked arms with each of the sisters and with one another, and each one with the help of a pole (you had your own too) stepped forward, the men with confidence, the women with trust! The thoughtfulness of Father Grubinger showed his real concern for our safety.¹⁷

While making light of these endeavours, Margaret acknowledges the deeper challenges in a spiritual sense:

I now realise how St Therese of the Child Jesus was chosen as patron of the missions although she had never been there. I began to feel the strength of the power of the prayers of the sisters in Australia, not just of my congregation, but of all of the Mercy congregations and the children in our schools. It was their prayers that really helped.¹⁸

Easter Monday Mercy gatherings

Over the years, it was the custom at Easter or the Queen's Birthday Weekend for the Kunjingini and Torembi sisters to get together either at Kunjingini or Yangoru. Sister Joan Hooper relates:

The weather presented a problem. We could always rely on it being wet at Easter, which was when the various Mercy groups met up, either at Kunjinginii or Yangoru. Because of our isolation, we had to make a marathon effort to meet up with the other Mercies. If it was too wet to take the jeep, we went as far as possible sitting in a trailer drawn by the tractor, then walked to the main road to Burui and begged a ride from the priest there to our destination. Needless to say, we looked forward to these outings and enjoyed them immensely.¹⁹

Another account of the sisters' determination and ingenuity is related in the Kunjingini sisters' chronicle:

The Queen's birthday became a day when the communities of Kunj and Torembi met at the half-way station of Pagui, on the Sepik River. Early in the day the double canoe, complete with a little shelter built between the boats, floated upstream to Pagui, bringing sisters from Torembi. Kunj sisters were near the make-shift wharf, fully habited wearing large brimmed hats against the tropical sun, then it was to the bank to be met by Father Seigel, the Kunj station wagon and the overflow on the tractor. All too soon the day was ended, the trip was reversed and Torembi sisters were waved off, Australian flag flying. It was back to the sago swamps for another year.²⁰

Thus, there was an annual exiting, even if the weather was inclement, to take on the elements and the environment to come together in celebration, companionship and exchange. This was a custom which was carried on as the foundations increased. In years to come, Kairiru also offered ideal facilities for accommodation, relaxation, land and sea excursions, and also privacy and beauty for retreat and prayer.

A dream of primary and secondary education for girls

From the earliest years, the sisters encouraged the primary education of girls and female enrolment, attendance and success increased dramatically. Soon the possibility of girls

completing primary school at Torembi and Kunjingini became a reality. It was time for the next step to be taken. The building of a Mercy boarding high school for girls at Torembi! Mercy College would cater for the girls from the Wewak Diocese who had completed Standard Six.

Sister Valentine (Valerie) White, the first Headmistress, had the initiative, enthusiasm and drive for the task. Father Grubinger got builders to construct the school buildings for the school to commence in 1963. Under Sister Valentine's leadership the early students of Mercy College (at Torembi and later at Yarapos) were certainly captivated by the spirit of learning. Some progressed first to Yarapos, then to All Hallows in Brisbane to complete their secondary education²¹. Among them were Rose (Asoli) Maule, Heriberta Narombi, Elizabeth Saulep, Maria (Primong) Siria, Monica Tonjin and Christine Tamin, who as lay professional women, became leaders as the world around them and their people was rapidly changing.

Later developments of the Mercy Mission at Torembi (1971)

Later developments are recorded in the 1971 chronicle²², and selections are quoted here:

Health care. Sister Jacinta conducts the clinic on the station with the assistance of an indigenous nurse. Each month the two nurses visit the remote villages and conduct the Child Welfare Clinics as well as dress sores and attend to any sick people in the village. To two of these villages, Marap and Kosimbi, they are taken by plane, but have to walk home. In the case of Marap this is a six-hour walk. However, in order to break the walk sister stays overnight in another village, Yamok, doing the clinic there the following morning. When the weather and road permit there are four villages which can be reached by jeep. The clinics for the closer villages are done on the station.

The primary school and high school. There are three sisters and six indigenous teachers in the primary school which has an enrolment this year of 264 with standards ranging from One to Six.

The high school now at Yarapos went through some of its growing pains at Torembi, as it commenced here in 1963. However, as the number of students increased the isolation of Torembi and the expense involved in flying in students and food supplies prompted the move to a more accessible area. The permanent buildings erected for the high school have proved an asset to the primary school, and we now boast of a special Mathematics Room, Science Room and Library.

Village visitation. The sisters walk to the villages on visitation on Sunday afternoons in the dry season. However, there are times when we arrive at a village only to find it practically deserted, except for a few women and children. As New Guinea has developed, the people have become more materialistically minded and there has been a general falling away from the church in most areas. Our church has surprisingly few adults in it on a Sunday morning.

Though Torembi may be thought of as the Cinderella of our missions, those of us who are here are proud and happy to be working for the Lord in this hidden corner of the vineyard, and hope and pray that the seed we are sowing will one day bear fruit.

Time to leave Torembe

In an attempt to keep the school leavers from moving restlessly into the town centres, the sisters taught agriculture, which focused on fisheries and the growing of rice. Stan, a lay missionary from Australia, taught the students how to raise cattle. But with localisation of the primary schools achieved, the sisters withdrew from Torembe in 1974. Some sisters moved out to other ministries within the Wewak Diocese, while others, their overseas mission accomplished, returned to Australia. The seedling of secondary education nurtured in the sago swamplands of Torembe was to take root firmly at Mercy College Yarpas. There young women throughout the Sepik Province, with some from the Highlands as well, were offered a Christian secondary education.

Deep impressions of Torembe times

Sister Joan Hooper, one of the early sisters, returned to join in the celebrations of the 50 years of the parish at Kunjingini in 1999. Her recollections show a depth of feeling for the people of PNG:

Returning to PNG in 1999 – 24 years after I left – was a wonderful experience. It was the change in the women which made the deepest impression on me. I was amazed at the progress the women had made. Sitting in the Cathedral in Wewak the day Bishop Arkfeld died and watching the women stand up in front of the packed Cathedral and address the congregation was wonderful, knowing that, in some small way we had helped in this progress through our work in the schools and boarding schools, where we encouraged the girls to value themselves and their worth.

Looking back, I realise I received much more from the people of PNG than I was ever able to give. I am grateful to God and to Mother Damian for giving me the opportunity to serve in PNG.²³

The obituary written in Brisbane's *Catholic Leader* for the foundress of this inter-congregational community at Torembe, Sister Mary Joseph Xavier Byrne, states simply:

In 1958 she led four other sisters in setting up a school for indigenous children at Torembe in Papua New Guinea's Wewak Diocese. She spent five years there and two years at a mission station at Kunjingini. She then returned to Brisbane for health reasons and taught at a number of schools.²⁴

Despite the rather inhospitable environment, Torembe has maintained a place of special affection in the hearts of many of the sisters who ministered there. It was the first of their places in the Wewak Diocese they had to leave. They recall with joy their happy days in community and ministry. Nearly fifty years later one can still imagine the distant echoes of the melodious singing of Sister Therese Kelly, as she and Sister Mary Wildie strolled on the airstrip after the evening Rosary; the whirring of the bicycle wheels as the tiny band of sisters cycled from morning Mass along the edge of the airstrip; and the vibrant tones of the men, women and children singing together as they hauled in the building materials for Torembe Mission on their sturdy shoulders!

Endnotes

- 1 Excerpt from Wewak Diocese Report, 1980.
- 2 As reported in *The Catholic Leader*, February 13, 1958.
- 3 Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Toremby, 1958.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 Dated February 28, 1962 in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.
- 6 Assistant health worker with basic professional training.
- 7 From an extract of a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- 8 Native materials used in construction of houses.
- 9 Extract from a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.
- 10 From an extract of a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.
- 11 From an interview with Sister Elva Russell, May, 2005.
- 12 Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Toremby, 1958.
- 13 Clan officials appointed during colonial times.
- 14 From an extract in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane
- 15 Information about the original dormitories and Maternal and Child clinics (MCH) was provided by Sister Mary Wildie in a conversation in June, 2007.
- 16 Excerpt taken from an interview with Sister Madeleine in Wewak, May, 2006.
- 17 Excerpt taken from an interview with Sister Margaret Rush in May 2005.
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 From a report by Sister Joan Hooper, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- 20 Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Toremby.
- 21 Information provided by Mrs Rose Maule, and ex-Yarapos Sisters.
- 22 These excerpts of the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy Brisbane were written by Sister Joan Hooper.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 From a report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.



Setting out on Visitation by canoe.



Sister Cephas and village people.



First High School girls - Mercy College, Torembi, 1963.



TOREMBI (1958-1974)

Founding Community

Joseph Xavier Byrne (Superior - Brisbane), Annunziata McNamara (Townsville), Therese (Vincent) Kelly (Grafton), Elva (Gertrude) Russell (Cairns), Mary (Felix) Wildie (Rockhampton).

Loyola Boyle
Joseph Xavier Byrne
Misericordia Carter
Maureen (Augustine) Grant
Joan (Chrysostom) Hooper
Carmel McCormick
Annette (Shirley) Myers
Christine Riordan
Elva (Gertrude) Russell
Jacinta Wiedman

Eileen (Monina) Brosnan
Irene Callanan
Philippine Connors
Josefena Dooley
Vincent (Therese) Kelly
Annunziata McNamara
Cephas Philben
Margaret (Matthew) Rush
Valerie (Valentine) White
Mary (Felix) Wildie

Ministries

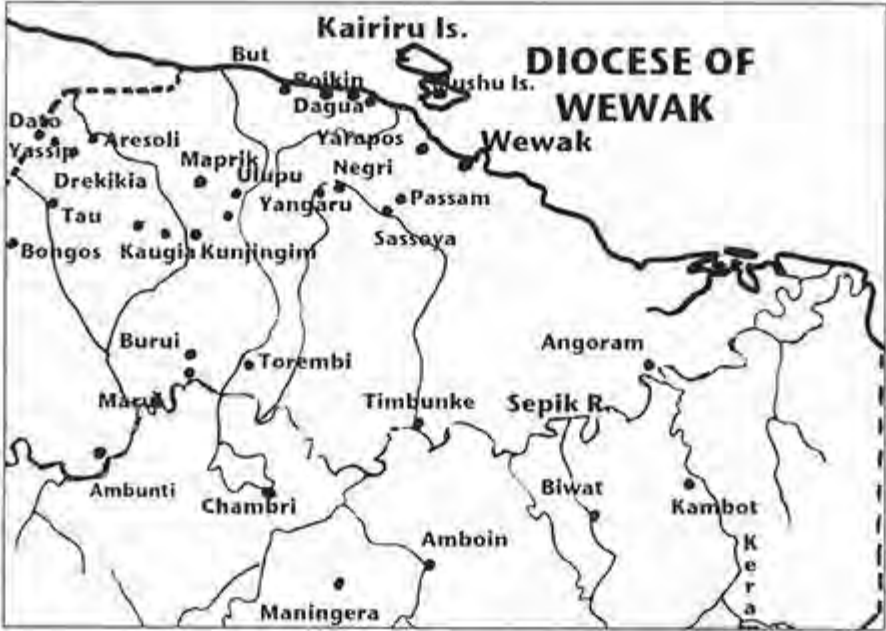
Primary and High School Teaching, Religious Education, Health Care and MCH Patrols, Pastoral Work, Visitation, Hospitality.



Chapter 5

1960s WEWAK CROSSINGS

In the 1960s Mercy Sisters made adjustments in Australia and Papua New Guinea to allow new communities to venture forth in mission. The Highlands saw the Goroka sisters move across to Simbu (1963) and the North Sydney Congregation make foundations in Pumakos (1965) and Mount Hagen (1968). In the Wewak Diocese the Rockhampton Congregation made a foundation at Yangoru (1963). The sisters of the Wewak Diocese re-organised communities to allow sisters to make foundations at Ulupu (1963), Yarapos (1966) and Kaindi (1969).



- 1963 » Rockhampton to Yangoru
- 1963 » Kunjingini to Ulupu
- 1966 » Torembo to Yarapos
- 1969 » Kunjingini and Ulupu to Kaindi

FROM AUSTRALIA: ROCKHAMPTON MERCY SISTERS TO YANGORU (1963-1982)

Bishop Arkfeld implored the Superior General of the Rockhampton Sisters, Mother Mary Fabian, for a band of Mercy Sisters for Yangoru in the Wewak Diocese for 1963. She generously agreed to this request and her reasons and actions are reported in the sisters' chronicle:

Because we are living members of the universal Church, we cannot be indifferent to the cares and hardships, the sufferings and the burdens of our fellow members, whoever and wherever they may be. We cannot remain indifferent and complacent as long as the greater part of the human family does not know Christ. These were the reasons that prompted us to send a community of sisters to Yangoru in New Guinea in 1963 at the invitation of Bishop Leo Arkfeld, SVD, Bishop of Wewak.¹

Soon, Mother Fabian and Sister Regis Taaffe, Bursar General of the Rockhampton Mercy Sisters, made the journey northwards to Wewak. Thence, accompanied by Sister Mary (Felix) Wildie, a Rockhampton sister working at Torembe, the two sisters flew with Bishop Arkfeld to survey the proposed field of their labour at Yangoru Mission Station, situated at the foothills of Mount Turu (Waleburu). Due to heavy rain they were unable to fly back to Wewak that afternoon, so Bishop Leo and the three sisters slept at the presbytery and Father Mormon, the parish priest, went over to the brothers' house behind the presbytery.

Four were chosen

Several sisters responded to the request for volunteers and four were chosen. They were: Sisters Mary (Felix) Wildie (Superior), Stancia (Philomene) Cawte, Patricia (Genevieve) Wood and Kathleen (Sarto) Breen.



Back Row. Sisters Mary Wildie and Patricia Wood.
Front Row. Sisters Kathleen Breen and Stancia Cawte.

Missioning to Yangoru

The sisters received their mission crosses – a symbol of their special apostolate – from his Lordship, Bishop Rush, at a ceremony in the Rockhampton Cathedral on February 3, 1963. His public address at this time emphasised the fresh teachings of the first session of the Vatican Council (1962-1965). He spoke of the universal concern of more than 2,000 bishops at the Council who were painfully aware of the needs of the Church everywhere, and were firmly committed to their own responsibility to give Christ to the world.

Referring to a recent letter of Pope John XXIII Bishop Rush stated:

The life of a religious must be a life of prayer, example and apostolate. The Church's apostolate is as wide as the world. It reminds us that the true Catholic mind is, of necessity, universal.

The decision of Mother General and her council to send a community to New Guinea is a salutary lesson to all of us for there is not one of us who is not in danger of falling prey to a narrow parochialism. Tonight's moving ceremony is a timely reminder that the Church's apostolate is as wide as the world. We, all of us, are the Church. We, all of us, have the responsibility to help extend the Church's influence, and not only here [in the Rockhampton Diocese], but everywhere in the world.

Bishop Leo Arkfeld, an American Divine Word Missionary, of German descent, has been the Vicar Apostolic since 1948, and has seen his flock grow until they are more than one-third of the population. Very tall, with a spare body that shows the effects of long years of tireless endeavour, he is a quiet, gentle man with a quality of supreme confidence. He will tell you with a tranquil smile, that, give him enough priests and nuns, his whole diocese will be converted. The sisters leaving us tonight will find in him a great modern missionary bishop and a true father in God.²

Preparing for the journey northwards

While preparing to leave for the mission, the sisters collected as much as they could to furnish their convent. The Catholic community was very generous to the intrepid young missionary sisters. They left Rockhampton for Brisbane and from there took flight for the New Guinea mission at about midnight on February 13, 1963. The mission work of the Rockhampton sisters was about to begin.

Beginnings at Negrie

As their convent was not ready when they arrived, the sisters took up residence on February 25 in what was formerly the priest's house at a mission station, Negrie, approximately 5 kilometres away. There, Sisters Genevieve, Philomene and Sarto began working in the unregistered school assisting the permit teachers³ on staff. On March 1, 1963, Sister Mary Felix set up a temporary clinic at Negrie. They visited many villages in the Negrie area, the hike to Waramuru, about 2,000 feet above sea level, being the longest and most strenuous. In these villages they had a chance to talk to the people and to see them in their own surroundings. They observed that the people possessed little of this world's goods and seemed content with little more than a roof over their heads. They grew their own food in well cared for gardens. With a sense of pride, they showed the visitors their *haus tambaran* [their place of spirit worship] built on ground on which a church had stood in pre-war years.⁴

Beginnings at Yangoru

Six months later, on July 17, the community moved into their new convent at Yangoru. The building was originally intended to be the priest's house, but because of the delay, the Vicar General, Father Heinemans arranged for the sisters to have it on completion. At last their own little place was finished and they settled into life there. The sisters' beginnings and first

impressions are recorded in their chronicle.

The convent. The convent is built on the side of a hill and is comfortable. It is a long, wooden building with a wide verandah on one side. All the rooms are well ventilated and spacious. The chapel has a devotional atmosphere. The kitchen and laundry, as is the custom in New Guinea, are separate buildings of native material.

Evangelisation. On Sundays there are three Masses at Yangoru, and the church is filled at each Mass. The Yangoru area has up to this time about 2,042 Catholics and 2,700 Catechumens. The Catechumens receive instruction for three years before they are baptised. Each week they come into the mission station, and the native Catechist instructs them for several hours. The Catechist at Yangoru is particularly good, and has a great influence over the people.

St Thomas' Primary School. On July 22 1963, we began work at St Thomas' School, Yangoru. The school has about three hundred children from the area. The sisters have six indigenous teachers to assist them. Each class has a separate school house built of native material. The floor in most of them is earthen, and is covered with little pebbles from the bed of the mountain stream which runs close by.



Yangoru mission station church and classrooms.



The sisters' convent, Yangoru.

The sisters set about their task in the school

The sisters saw their educational task as one of re-founding the school because it had lost its registration the year before. There was much to be done in terms of providing adequate school buildings and desks, raising standards and providing assistance to the national staff so that the school could regain its official registration. This was achieved the following year after the government inspection. Bishop Rush visited the mission in July 1967, and conscious of their needs, had two brick class rooms constructed by 1968, through the generosity of his Rockhampton people. At last a complete primary school was established and highly successful. Standard Six students gained places in high schools at Wewak or at the new high school in Yangoru. Moreover, girls previously excluded from Standards Four, Five and Six were now encouraged to attend these classes with the boys. The school flourished, numbers increased and results were excellent.

Primary education: towards localisation

Sister Stancia Cawte, Head Teacher of the school, explained how the sisters saw their role in the school:

In a developing country the emphasis is always on the training of local personnel and over the years we have seen this as one of our major tasks. Each year saw more and more local teachers receiving their teaching certificates and taking up positions in our primary schools. Sisters who have served from time to time in our school in Yangoru, Genevieve Wood, Beryl Amedee, Margaret Dixon and Desma Clarke, have assisted these teachers to gain confidence in their work. In 1966 Sister Mary Josephine (Nina) Barra from Townsville Congregation joined our community.

In 1973, our goal had almost been reached in this area of our mission work, when the number of sisters in the Yangoru Primary School was reduced from three to two, thus freeing me to experiment in the setting up of a Girls' Vocational Centre.⁵



School Assembly, Yangoru.

A wider focus on adult faith formation and literacy

Meanwhile, the sisters turned their attention to the needs of adults and those left out of the education system in the parish. Sister Stancia's report explains this new focus:

This year (1971) the first children to complete their primary education in our school, were enrolled in the diocesan high schools. And yet, in spite of the number being educated there are still 70 per cent of the children of school age in this area at home in their villages working in the gardens with their parents. The only catechetical instruction they receive is at Sunday Mass, or the weekly Catechumen class which they attend with their parents. To try to overcome this problem even in a small way, we have commenced weekly adult education classes in which our pupils, whom we are pleased to note are made up mostly of this school age group, learn to read and write in Tok Pisin. As well as this, one of the sisters runs a weekly sewing and cooking class for the young girls of the parish in an effort to improve hygiene and child care among the future mothers.

Progress is slow and so much remains to be done, but a start has been made, and even though we may be only scratching the surface in our efforts to uplift our people spiritually and temporally, we feel sure with the prayers of the people of the Rockhampton Diocese, God in his own good time will bring our efforts to fruition.⁶

Setting up a vocational centre for young women

When localisation of the primary school was almost complete, Sister Stancia was then free to address the special needs of the many young female ex-students who were unable to gain a successful place in high school. She saw the establishment of a vocational centre as a way of offering them livelihood and Christian leadership skills.

This centre was intended to give extra training in the domestic arts to girls who were unable to go on to high school. This experiment has proved successful and these girls are now taking their place in the village as leaders among the women. At present approximately 30% of primary school leavers are not able to continue their studies in high school owing to a shortage of teachers and facilities.⁷

The curriculum covered areas of Home Science. The young women learnt cooking, including bread-making (using ovens of heated stones, or made from 44 gallon drums), hygiene, religion and simple book-keeping methods to suit local financial practice. They learnt to sew using hand machines. It was calculated that the skills taught in the vocational school would gradually enrich the life style of the village women.⁸

Stories from the village

Theresia Nakankwien, like so many female students at the time, was not selected to continue high school education beyond Grade Eight, and, at Sister Margaret Houlihan's request, agreed to help the sisters in the kitchen and the laundry. Theresia later entered the Sisters of Mercy. She recalled hearing the stories of gratitude openly expressed by the women in the village for the work of the Yangoru sisters. In particular, this was for the skills of earning a livelihood through the vocational centre and the sewing lessons of the women's club.⁹

Beginnings of Health Care

Sister Mary Wildie, the Superior and nurse, reports on the opening of mission health services:

A clinic was opened in Yangoru in 1963 to meet the growing needs of the people. The clinic is the focal point of the community's nursing activity which embraces some 13 professional clinics in the neighbouring villages. Maternal and Child Health Care centres (MCH) were set up and recognition for a nurse was given in October 1965. Fortunately the numerous villages were accessible by jeep, a far cry from the long walks at Torembi. Once a month I was flown out to Drekikir for clinic work and first aid care. As well as first aid of all sorts, nursing care is given each month to about 1300 infants and children and 70 expectant mothers. Regular visits are paid to the clinics established in many of the villages. On the south side a special hospital provides urgent help for Maternal and Child Health Care.¹⁰

Collaboration in services with government

The nursing services continued to develop in the district. Sister Marlene (Marie Bernard) Fitzgibbons, who replaced Mary Wildie, noted that a newly built rural health centre at the Yangoru government station was lying vacant. She approached the government authority, Dr Gobius, for approval to take it over in the role of supervisor.

Sister Marlene recalls his response:

Dr Gobius welcomed me with open arms, and I moved into the health centre, and applied for nurses aids, vehicle, dokta bois and also supplies and particularly a ward for deliveries. I had a jeep and it was just seven minutes away, across the airstrip to the convent. I did all my own clinics with one 'dockta boi'.¹¹ I went to most of the villages – the furthest being two to three hours away. Because we took over the Government Health Centre we were responsible for the whole area – Father Willie Mormon's parish at Wilaru, Negrie and Yangoru Parishes. We covered about 50 on a monthly basis.¹²

Sister Marlene relates that, with village help through the council, the health centre provided a vegetable garden the whole length of the airstrip, with peanuts, greens and sweet potatoes to help the malnourished babies. She also focused on preventative medicine and safe practice.

The Mercy Sister nurses collaborate

The Mercy Sisters in the area – Vianney from Ulupu, Jill (Raymond) Stringer from Kunjigini, Jacinta Wiedman from Torembi, Mary and Marlene from Yangoru, and Margarita from St Benedicts Kaindi – worked together on what was needed for the common ailments and enjoyed this challenge. The sister nurses found that certain medication could cure the skin disease, called grille, which could cover the whole body. To their surprise and delight, the suffering person would soon be restored to complete health. The sisters also got large quantities of ointment which was successful in treating even the most advanced tropical ulcers. As a pharmacist, Sister Margarita would get bulk quantities of Vaseline, mix the ingredients for the ointments and supply them to the sisters in bulk.

Localisation – a story of perseverance

The sisters record in their chronicle a proud moment for all concerned when one of the *dokta bois*, after years of service, became fully qualified:

This has been an important month in the life of Mr John Hausepongu as he was put on the government payroll and now receives a Gov salary each fortnight. John, a married man with eight children, began working for the sisters at Yangoru when Sister Felix was here. He did some training as a dokta boi but received most of his training through working with Sister Felix and then Sister Marlene, assisting with clinics and outpatients. So far about thirteen years John worked faithfully with the sisters and was paid by the mission. In the last five years the Mater Hospital in Mackay sent enough money for his salary and this helped us considerably. And so now John, his wife Cecilia and family have reason to rejoice. John is now an Aid Post Orderly at Kumbukum, his own village.¹³

A sad experience

The nursing sisters had many serious cases, and there were some lives that, despite all their efforts, they were unable to save. Sister Stancia writes:

Have you even been wakened in the middle of the night by the sobbing of a mother whose baby has just died? A few nights ago we had such a heart-rending experience. A mother of seven children who had recently been deserted by her husband, had walked in about 6 pm with her youngest – a month-old girl – who was in an advanced state of pneumonia and suffering from malaria. Sister did what she could for the poor little mite but did not hold much hope of recovery, so Father baptised her, and then everyone just watched and waited. About 3 pm little Rita went back to God. Her mother then started her journey back to the village alone, apart from the sad bundle she carried in her arms, giving vent to her sorrow in the soft wail which is the custom of these people at the time of death.¹⁴

On the mission station

Schools, care of the sick, clinics, catechetical work, cooking, sewing and village visitation were typical mission station activities. Although religious life was fairly structured in those days, the community of sisters formed their own social contacts. As well as interaction with the clergy, there were the catechists and teachers and their families on the station. There were the hospital personnel of the government health centre administered by the sisters. There were also social visits with the Patrol Officer's family. There was interaction with the Yangoru High School community, particularly when Sister Margaret Houlihan (1974-78) and Sister Cheryl Camp from Negrie (1975) were on the staff. Yangoru was five hours' drive on the main highway from Wewak, and despite unreliable bridge crossings due to flooding or missing logs, it was a popular stopping place for mission travellers who enjoyed the hospitality and companionship provided by the sisters. Annual Easter Monday get-togethers of the Mercy Sisters from Kunjingini, Torembi, and Ulupu were highly anticipated events.

Sister Margaret Dixon recalled the exotic beauty on the bush walks, and how Stancia and she would stop in delight at the sight of the lilies and other tropical flowers. Other sisters talked

of the peace and solitude in the retreat of a quiet nook at the back of the convent, and the coolness of the picnic spot down by the river which bordered the mission station.

Evacuation from the mission station

During the pre-independence momentum of the 'Cargo Cult',¹⁵ Bishop Leo felt anxious for the safety of the sisters and came to evacuate them to Wewak. The sisters themselves had no fear of their own people turning against them, although they realised that clans from other areas who were to assemble at Mount Turu could well influence the Yangoru people against the mission. The sisters had a last Mass in the church and left, feeling very upset and somewhat like traitors.



Mount Turu.

Changing ministries near and far

The need to change ministries to suit new needs as the nation evolved was recognised and addressed by the sisters. These ministries began with adult literacy and vocational training and proceeded to include secondary teaching and pastoral work with women in the surrounding villages. Later developments saw more extensive pastoral work and links with St Benedict's Teachers College. Sister Stancia reports on how these changes first took place.

With full localisation of staff in primary schools almost a reality in 1973 we turned our attention to the possibility of having a sister on the staff of the government sponsored high school which was to be opened in 1974. At the same time the Ballarat Sisters of Mercy expressed a desire to become involved in mission work. Sister Margaret Houlihan, an experienced Domestic Science teacher from Ballarat, gained a position on the staff and was a foundation teacher of the high school from 1974 to 1978. She has done much for our Catholic children who are attending the school. Thus our apostolate continues, ever changing to meet the needs of an evolving nation.¹⁶

The country's recognition of service

The sisters' chronicle also records that on Friday June 16, 1976, Sister Marlene Fitzgibbons and Father Kelly were to be awarded an Independence Medal as a mark of thanks from the PNG Government for their services to the country. The medals were presented by the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, to 15 men at the Young Christians Centre (Youth Centre). Unfortunately, Sister Marlene was not able to be present and received her medal in absentia.

Education links after localisation

After completing her last year in the primary school as senior teacher supporting the new national Head Teacher and other members of staff, Sister Desma Clarke took up a position in St Benedict's Teachers Training College, Kaindi. She was appointed as lecturer and supervisor of the practice-teaching student teachers who would be teaching in schools in and near Yangoru throughout the year. This role involved extensive travel to the schools in the area.

Women's clubs and pastoral work in the villages

At first, the sisters developed women's clubs in the villages whereby the women were offered simple cookery, sewing and hygiene classes on the station. As time went on, this work was extended by Sister Athalie Neary, who began a regular program of visits to the villages. These were sometimes overnight stays on a bed of coconut leaves on the floor of the house of one of the families. During these visits, religious instruction and prayer meetings were combined with social work.

In time, Sister Maria Jean Rhule was appointed to do pastoral work among the women in the villages. To give her the added skills necessary for this special work, Sister Maria Jean attended a course specially designed for pastoral workers at Xavier Institute of Missiology, Bomana, outside Port Moresby. Her work involved visiting the women in the many villages, instructing them, consulting and advising them alone, in groups and at meetings. Religion, hygiene and Home Economics received attention.

Signs that it was time to leave Yangoru

By 1982, the declining number of sisters and a new phase in the growth of the local Church were signs that the Rockhampton sisters could no longer maintain their mission presence in Yangoru. Sister Betty Busuttin had replaced Sister Marlene Fitzgibbons in providing health care until localisation was effected in the government health services. Sister Carmel King from Negrie managed the vocational centre and Sister Cheryl Camp resided at Yangoru in her last years of pastoral ministry at Negrie. Justina Bedford and Maria Jean Rhule were the last Rockhampton sisters at Yangoru.

The Rosary Sisters replace the Mercy Sisters at Yangoru

Sister Wilhelmina of the Rosary Sisters had been living in community with Maria Jean and Justina, and negotiations were put in place with the Bishop for the Rosary Sisters to take over the convent and ministry. Maria Jean and Justina took care to ensure that the transition was a smooth one for the Rosary Sisters and the people. The official changeover occurred in December 1982 with Sister Maria Jean handing over the keys of the convent and the car to Sister Theresia Allen, Mother General of the Rosary Sisters.

The Rosary Sisters carried out their ministries from 1983-1997, when the Marist Brothers took over and have continued at Yangoru Catholic Mission since then.

Father Kelly's tribute to the Rockhampton sisters

In his farewell speech to the Rockhampton sisters, Father Bill Kelly, parish priest, recalled the contribution of the Rockhampton sisters.

Sister Felix started from rock-bottom in setting up her Infant Welfare Clinic. Besides her clinic here on the station, she was out almost every day, holding clinics in many villages – even beyond the boundaries of our parish. And knowing the climate here and the kind of roads she had to travel on, it must have been quite a challenge for her. But then, she was undoubtedly a mulier fortis. We used to call her 'Fearless Felix'. But the nurses who followed her, like Marie Bernard, seem to have been taken from the same mould – fearless and unafraid.

Starting out with teachers in community and high school, our nurses working to cut down the infant mortality, we finally reached the period when we saw our first pastoral sister. Pastoral sisters were unheard of in past years, but judging from what Maria Jean has accomplished in our parish, the idea was long over due. When Sister Stancia was Mother General, I begged her for two years to send us a pastoral sister. So I want to take this opportunity to thank you, Maria, for having so easily fitted into our set-up and for having been so co-operative and of such great help in furthering our endeavours here in the parish. We are happy to know that you are not leaving us, but just moving to a new locale.¹⁷

An overview by Father Victor Roche SVD

The Director of Communications in the Mount Hagen Diocese, and former parish priest of Yangoru, offered his reflections on his introduction to Yangoru by the Sisters of Mercy there, the transition to the Rosary Sisters, and the role of the Melanesian Sisters of Mercy.

After coming to PNG in March, 1981, my first appointment was in Ambunti, and then I was transferred to Yangoru for five years, taking over from Father Bill Kelly. Sister Maria Jean and Sister Justina from Rockhampton were there and were very good to me helping me to get to know the situation as a very new priest. They were able to give an introduction to the culture of PNG and Yangoru in particular. I was also able to adjust to Aussie culture – I had not been with Aussies in India. I should say that Maria Jean was very good to me and we still have contact. Irene Masterson used to come with the students and I came to know her. We were introduced by Joep Heinemans to people like Val and Helen White at Kaindi and Ursula at the novitiate. I would go there for Mass or a cup of coffee to the novitiate. I was more with the second group, and got to know them well – Theresia, Mariska and Angeline.

Sister Maria Jean was a very good pastoral worker, visiting parishes, giving instructions for baptisms, and preparation for the sacrament of marriage. She knew the parish very well, and was able to give me good directions. In those days they did a lot with the women, and also for grassroots – they were able to educate them in hygiene, and also able to bring material development to help them in some ways. It was very good to work with them. They knew Tok Pisin very well and were accepted very well by the people. They had adjusted to the culture and the local food. The hospitality of the sisters is worth

mentioning as they were very kind and generous to the priests of the Maprik deanery who came there. We on the Yangoru mission station had good relationships with neighbouring priests.

After two years, I was there to say goodbye to them when they went for good. I still remember the farewell Mass; the people really gave them a memorable farewell as they were traditionally dressed with the Yangoru bilas – shells, bilums and so on. By that time the first vocation to the Mercies came – Theresia Nakankwien. When I went she was still a girl helping the sisters. The sisters certainly left a legacy there. I come from a country where not much aid is given. The Yangoru people were very generous and conscious of being self-sufficient. I encouraged a lively liturgy for all to take part in, and the people would decorate the church and be involved in the readings and hymns. The Sunday collection went up and whenever there was any course or seminar, such as on youth, spirituality or health the people met most of the expenses. They also brought lots of vegetables and fruits for the parish and sisters.

When the sisters went it was a pleasant, meaningful transition. Initially the people were a little worried that the Australian sisters were going. But the people adjusted very well to the Rosary Sisters and it was a satisfactory transition.

Nowadays the local Church is heading towards self-sufficiency, regarding priests, brothers and sisters. Lay leaders are taking more participation in the decision making and running of the local communities and parishes. Before the priests and catechists took the lead and the people had to follow. Now it is obvious that the people are taking an active part in the parishes and this is a good change.

The Melanesian Sisters of Mercy will continue to be involved in women's emancipation and raising the dignity of the women. They carry out that role very well, whether they are in the schools, or pastoral ministry, or whatever work. I think they will be more involved in the pastoral work, in pastoral centres or parish. The local Mercy Sisters' contribution to the local Church will be effective and efficient. It is good they are able to stand on their own feet; they are going in the right direction, and they will be able to run their own affairs. They have a good future.¹⁸

Endnotes

¹ Taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yangoru.

² As reported in the Catholic press, Rockhampton, February 3, 1963.

³ Volunteers who were not qualified teachers.

⁴ Taken from a report entitled 'The Foundation of the Yangoru Mission' by Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy.

⁵ Taken from reports in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Sister Stancia's report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.

⁸ Taken from a report entitled 'The Foundation of the Yangoru Mission' by Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy, 1963, p 2.

⁹ In a recorded interview with Sister Theresia Nakankwien, May 2005.

¹⁰ From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.

¹¹ Health care worker with basic training.

¹² Taken from a recorded interview in Rockhampton, circa 1999.

- 13 From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yangoru.
- 14 Taken from a report of Sister Stancia Cawte, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- 15 An unorthodox religious movement in the wake of Western impact, especially in tribal societies in PNG.
- 16 Sister Stancia's report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- 17 This event was on October 16, 1982.
- 18 Taken from a recorded interview in Mount Hagen, May, 2006, p. 2.



YANGORU (1963 – 1982)

Founding Community

Mary (Felix) Wildie (Superior), Stancia (Philomene) Cawte, Patricia (Genevieve) Wood and Kathleen (Sarto) Breen.

Mary (Felix) Wildie

Nina (Josephine) Barra

Kathleen (Sarto) Breen

Cheryl Camp

Desma Clarke

Marlene (Marie Bernard) Fitzgibbons

Irene Masterson

Maria Jean Rhule

Beryl (Mary Robert) Amedee

Justina Bedford

Betty Busuttin

Stancia (Philomene) Cawte

Margaret (Josephine Mary) Dixon

Margaret Houlihan

Athalie Neary

Patricia Wood

Ministries

Primary and High School Teaching, Vocational Centre Management, Cluster Supervision – Teacher Education, Religious Education, Health Care Management and MCH Patrols, Pastoral Work, Visitation, Hospitality.



BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO ULUPU (1963-1976)

Ulupu mission was opened in a mountainous area by German Divine Word missionaries before the war. The buildings were on a hill about 200 metres above sea level where much shovel work had been done to bring forth several terraces. Ulupu had a tropical look, with pawpaws, bananas and palm trees growing in abundance. The mosquitoes were not as bad as on the Sepik, and at times, there was a fresh breeze. The Kunj sisters used to go there for a day's outing each year, and it became known as "Paradise" or "Tropicana". Father August Knor was anxious to get a group of sisters for his station at Ulupu, and at odd times, they would receive a card of some sort with a caption, "Sisters of Mercy have mercy on Ulupu."¹²

Bishop Arkfeld asks Mother Damian for sisters

Bishop Arkfeld wrote a letter to the Mother General dated April 17, 1959, in which he wrote:

I believe you have just had a big meeting with the religious superiors. Perhaps Yangoru was discussed, or Ulupu? I'm looking forward to that day, but I must also confess my inability to get the buildings up quickly.¹

Three years later, on July 23, 1962, Mother Damian wrote to Bishop Arkfeld and asked his permission to establish another community of Mercy Sisters in New Guinea at Ulupu.⁴ Father Knor's response to Mother Damian on July 29, 1962 was very enthusiastic:

I'm working very hard to make everything ready for the nuns. Hope to have my new house up in a month's time, and then I can start in my old house. We'll make the kitchen much bigger and I asked the Bishop already for a big water tank. Later on we will have the whole water from the roof of the new church, and we should never run out of water. You mentioned a bigger stove, if possible please send this stove before the sisters arrive so that I can put it up. I'm working very hard to get everything ready for the big event. I just started to put up a new house for myself... The sisters will move into my old house which is a bush house with an iron roof, and is real nice and comfortable. We'll make a bigger kitchen only, and fix up all the rooms downstairs.⁵

Sisters appointed to Ulupu

The sisters appointed to Ulupu were Mary Francis Regis Everingham (local Superior), Mary Loyola Boyle, Mary (de Padua) Scanlan, Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood (nurse) and Valerie (Jude) Birchley (experienced infant teacher). On January 20, 1963 they received their mission crosses, along with others of the Brisbane community who had become missionaries.⁶

Beginnings – Not quite as expected!

The sisters found out when they arrived on February 11, 1963, that unfortunately, not everything had turned out as planned. Sister Valerie Birchley recalls:

None of this happened prior to our arrival. We had two open 44 gallon drums to catch water, there was a little tiny stove on four blocks, which we made do with, and a dirt floor in the kitchen, and God bless him, he was a good man, he made slabs of cement down at the river and he put them down for the floor – he was a very resourceful man.⁷

Despite the initial surprise at so little being in readiness, the sisters maintained a sense of composure and humour;

*When we arrived at the village at Ulupu we were given a rousing welcome. All the families had gathered not to welcome the sisters, but to pay their taxes! So everyone was there!*⁸

Difficulties and frustrations had thwarted Father Knor's noble designs and stoic efforts, a not uncommon situation where everything had to be done manually and with semi-skilled, albeit willing labour. Also, Father Knor admitted to being somewhat reluctant to go ahead with some alterations that might not suit the sisters' needs. However, things were on the move as the sisters' chronicle reports.

The sisters' convent

The sisters describe their convent:

Father's two storey house, which became the convent was at the top [of the hill]. The dining room boasted a fine firm crockery press made of pieces of timber and masonite, the woodwork being painted red. There was also a table made big enough for 8. The kitchen was enlarged and made airy and suitable. Adjoining the kitchen a new store room lined with sturdy shelves was added. On the upper floor were five rooms, a large one in the middle, with two smaller ones on each side of it.

*The chapel was downstairs to the right, with the woven matting, and he had a tabernacle from Germany, it was a lovely gold, and it blended in so well and he took pains to build the altar, and he varnished it, it was lovely. One strong memory of the chapel – Adoration on the first Sunday of the month, and turns on the prie-dieux, taking over from Loyola, and the perspiration was running down, and the perspiration was on the kneelers – it showed what it was like in the heat.*⁹

The school, nursing and visitation

The Sisters of Mercy adjusted to the demands of mission life in teaching, nursing and visitation. From her experience at Kunjingini, Mother Regis was able to guide the sisters as they quickly involved themselves in the life of the entire parish. Beginnings at the school were recorded by the sisters:

*There were four local teachers in the school – Gabriel Sepiwi of Yalehine, Beno Glengu of Onyalup, Alois Yeviora from Bugitu and Alois Pil from Ulupu. Of these the first two had A certificates and the last two had finished Grade Six. There were only four school houses, but before the second week was over a completely new one had been built and plans made to convert the teacher's house into another one. It too, was soon finished. But lots of desks had to be ordered and waited for. The convent was on the top of a hill, the church at the bottom of it. Five school houses on a lower level, and one on a lower level again. This meant a constant walk up hill – not steep but at the same time, the ascent was an effort.*¹⁰



Sisters' arrival and welcome at Ulupu.

Everyday life

The constant fear of snakes and efforts to eliminate rats were part of daily living. Dangers on the treacherous tracks in the wet season were faced. At times these were virtually impassable, and passage was only possible with the help of chains on the wheels of the four-wheel drive vehicles, skilful and fearless driving and the combined strength of several village people.

Sister Jill Stringer, a nurse in temporary vows, who began in Kunjingini, and who later went to Ulupu, Kairiru Island and Wewak, comments on daily life.

Our lifestyle in New Guinea was very simple and we depended very much on each other for support and friendship. Our spirituality was nurtured with the daily celebration of the Eucharist, and community prayer as well as our own personal prayer that was provided for within our horarium.

I will be forever grateful for being given the privilege to work in the New Guinea missions. The people taught me so much about patience, acceptance and simplicity – lessons that I am sure helped to form me as the person I am today.¹¹

Time and opportunity for change

The sisters in the three mission stations of Kunjingini, Torembi and Ulupu lived the religious life in conformity with the Federation sisters' regulations and this included wearing the full religious



Sisters' Convent, Ulupu.

habit. In the tropical heat the sisters felt considerable discomfort, clad in the long pleated white habits, firm stockings, starched head-dress and long veil. At the level of inconvenience, there was the impossibility of keeping them clean, as the sisters, in hot perspiring conditions, carried out the manual inside and outside tasks on the station and ventured out on foot on visitation to the villages. Countless grass seeds inevitably and tenaciously attached themselves to the sturdy stockings, causing extreme irritation.

However, for some sisters, the situation was more serious and this was so with a young Irish sister, Loyola Boyle, who could not get rid of skin irritation and inflammation caused by prickly heat "from head to toe". She endured this for more than two years, with a growing fear she would eventually be forced to return to Australia.¹²

At this critical stage¹³, Bishop Arkfeld appeared on the scene, and in his pastoral way, enquired how the sisters were. In her forthright way, Sister Loyola admitted that she was not able to manage the heat, whereupon the Bishop turned to Mother Francis Regis: "Do you think you could



Sister Val Birchley and pupil at Ulupu, 1963.

write a letter to Mother Damian and ask her to change the dress?" Mother Regis's response was equally forthright: "Yes, my Lord." Offering to add a covering letter, the Bishop departed, leaving the sisters grateful for his timely intervention.

Within three weeks, the sisters received news that the coif covering the head, ears and neck was to be replaced by a simple veil reaching to the shoulders. Previously the veil reached the hem of the habit, which itself was three inches from the ground. The habit was reduced to a more normal dress size, with a simpler style, short sleeves and mid-calf length. New 'modified' religious dresses, made according to each sister's measurements were soon posted from Brisbane to the sisters at Ulupu.¹⁴ This story is to be interpreted in the context of change after Vatican II when

issues of religious dress and adaptation to the Church in the modern world were under discussion.

Change and adaptation, however, were part and parcel of daily life in school and health services. New arrivals came from Brisbane to swell the ranks. These young and energetic women, filled with enthusiasm for the freeing doctrines of Vatican II, applied themselves to the demanding ministry among the people.



Sister Vianney working at clinic, Ulupu.

Ulupu – off the beaten track!

In the sisters' chronicle, Sister Valerie Birchley gives an account of the isolation faced by the sisters at Ulupu:

The isolation was another factor. It was five years before the road was built by the Army from Wewak to Yangoru. A main road passed on the way through from Yangoru to Maprik, and we were off the road from these two places, with only narrow tracks into Ulupu, and I remember driving on a straight road into Wewak – like a free bird. We had planes that could bring our supplies, but our strip was a short strip, and only the Bishop and Father Ruiter could come in...Torembi and Kunj were on flat areas. There was far more accessibility from Maprik to Kunjingini than Maprik to Ulupu.¹⁵

The closing of Ulupu Mercy Mission

The sisters continued their ministries in the schools, the clinics and outstations. After 13 years, they were sad to leave Ulupu in 1976. By that time, they had made many friends among the people, and were able to leave knowing they had worked towards and achieved localisation of education and health. Faced with decreasing numbers, the sisters were being led to other

ministries within the Wewak Diocese – ministries that would take them forward from the small but stable communities of the rural areas with a focus on wider needs of the diocese.



Bishop Leo visits Ulupu for Confirmation.

Endnotes

- ¹ Archival sources from the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane, and SVD historian, Father Geoffrey Brumm,
- ² Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ *ibid.*
- ⁷ Reported by Sister Valerie Birchley, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁸ Extract from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Ulupu.
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Extract from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Ulupu.
- ¹¹ From reminiscences of Sister Jill Stringer in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ¹² Personal communication of Sister Loyola Boyle, June, 2006.
- ¹³ Circa 1965.
- ¹⁴ Personal communication of Sister Loyola Boyle, June, 2007.
- ¹⁵ Extract from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Ulupu, written by Sister Valerie Birchley.



ULUPU (1973-1976)

Founding Community

Francis Regis Everingham (Superior), M. Loyola Boyle, Mary (de Padua) Scanlan,
Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood and Valerie (Jude) Birchley

Valerie (Jude) Birchley

Mary Loyola Boyle

Irene Callanan

Anne Frances Carroll

Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood

Philippine Connors

Francis Regis Everingham

Kay (Coronata) Farrell

Nola (St Gregory) Gray

Joan (Chrysostom) Hooper

Mary (Regina Mary) O'Keeffe

Cephas Philben

Christine Riordan

Mary (de Padua) Scanlan

Jill (Raymond) Stringer

Ministries

Primary Teaching, Supervision of Teachers, Visitation,
Health and Maternal and Child Health (MCH)
Co-ordination of Religious Education.



BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO YARAPOS (1966-)

The Mercy high school, which began in Torembe with Sister Valerie (Valentine) White as Headmistress in 1963, was transferred to Yarapos in 1966. Close to Wewak, this was a more central location for the first secondary school for girls. This school catered not only for those from the Sepik Province, but for girls from the Highlands provinces whose parents would only allow their daughters to proceed to secondary education because they were in the care of the sisters. Stories of the 'evacuation' from Torembe have since been related among the sisters – of Sister Maureen Grant and the other Torembe sisters packing the books and teaching materials in Torembe in an assortment of appropriately labelled boxes for mission air transport to Wewak!¹

The founding members were a youthful, enthusiastic and talented band of teachers: Sisters Christine Watt, Valerie (Valentine) White, Maureen (Augustine) Grant, Philippine Connors, and Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan from Brisbane and Mae (Bernard) McMurrough from West Perth. The first religious Superior of Mercy College, now Mercy Secondary School, Yarapos, was Sister Christine Watt.



Founding Members of Mercy College Yarapos: Sisters Maureen Grant, Valerie White, Christine Watt, Mae McMurrough and Denise Coghlan.

Beginnings of Mercy College Yarapos

Sister Christine reflects on the beginnings:

The land was owned by Mama Christina, a great lady, who had been in the war. The whole of the school land at Yarapos had been occupied by the Japanese, and the local people were forced to make gardens and produce vegetables for the Japanese, so in a sense it was a very historical site. Two little streams that flowed through the property to the sea had been cleared by the Japanese. They were then able to access the coast at Wom, which was the point at which the Japanese surrendered to the Australians about a month after World War II finished. The distance would have been about a mile and a half as the crow flies, but when we used to walk there with the girls for swimming it was about 3 miles walking distance.

The High School had moved from Torembo to Yarapos, so Yarapos was really a new foundation... The campus was actually built around us. We lived originally in one of the classroom blocks until the diocese built a house for us the other side of the creek some time later. We had 126 girls who were all boarders. The majority came from the Sepik but there were 22 from the Highlands and a few from Vanimo.

The early days were very pioneering days and significant people at that time were Father Kees Meier our parish priest and Father Yoep Heinemans who managed the money matters concerning the actual building of the school. The foreman, Benedict, who was a Papua New Guinean, was a most trusted and reliable builder.²

Difficulties of the environment

At times, difficulties of heat and malaria faced everyone on the campus. The girls amazed the sisters with their ability to endure pain and their resilience after malaria attacks. After bearing the double bass frog sounds of the night, many hearts could be lifted with the early morning bird calls and the sound of a contingent of Yarapos girls, routinely and rhythmically wielding their saraps³ under the capable direction of the prefects, thus curbing the ever-encroaching jungle grasses.

Early traditions of 'valiant woman'

There is no doubting the sheer hard work and physical labour involved in the humble beginnings of Mercy College Yarapos. Under the banner of 'Valiant Woman', Sister Valentine set the emphasis on human development – intellectual and spiritual, physical and moral, emotional and artistic. The pioneer Yarapos girls worked hard in co-operating with the sisters in clearing the ground and establishing agricultural plots to make the school as self-reliant as possible. The tradition of self-reliance continued as teenage girls were challenged and



Mercy College Motto: Valiant Woman.

empowered through leadership opportunities and life skills to promote self-reliance in their future lives through gardening and poultry raising. From the earliest times, music and singing was a hallmark of the school curriculum and many were the musicals that enthralled audiences of the young and the old at the school and later in the Wirui Sound Shell. The first debate was held at Brandi High School in 1966, with teams from Brandi, St Xavier's (Kairiru) and Yarapos High Schools. The tradition of social and academic interaction continued and in the 1980s, Yarapos girls and the St Xavier boys on Kairiru enjoyed debates, socials and personal development sessions in collaboration with Brother Pat Howley FMS, when he was Headmaster of St Xavier's. Later developments saw the involvement and services of a full-time counsellor, Sister Thuy Nguyen RSM.

Sister Denise Coghlan, the third Headmistress of Yarapos, commented on the pride the sisters felt in the success of their former students. She gave two examples. Their first university graduate, Rosa Naipo, who came back to work among the villagers in a nutrition project and refused to be forced by officials to stay in her office. Rose insisted on working with the women of the villages to answer the needs they expressed.⁴ Josepha Namsu, from Wom-Boikin, graduated as the first woman lawyer in 1978 and went on to head the Law Reform Commission and champion land reform and women's rights.

Religious Education and supportive role of chaplains

Sister Wendy Flannery and other early sisters of Yarapos were involved in adapting Religious Education programs to suit the PNG cultural context in accordance with the teachings of the Vatican Council. As a member of the Bishops' Sub-commission for Secondary Religious Education, Wendy produced materials for students and teachers that were for use in all Catholic high schools in PNG.⁵ The Brisbane sisters in Wewak and the Townsville sisters in Negrie actively promoted the Self-Study of the Church, as reported by the first Director of the Melanesian Institute, Father Hermann Janssen⁶. The enthusiasm and challenge of these changes was passed on to the young women students, and as a result, powerful and inspiring liturgies in the parish church, supported by the Divine Word Missionary chaplains, have since become a tradition. Records show that the first long-serving chaplain, Father Kees Meier (1966-1979) was followed by many others: Fathers Leo van der Helm, Cornelius Jooren, George Schubbe, Mike Hughes, John Moran, Tony San Pierre (OSB), Carl Wand, Liam Horsfall, Wojciek Beben, George Riffa (as deacon) and Liam Dunne. In recent times when there was no priest available for appointment as chaplain, young PNG parish priests fulfilled this role. For example, Father Otto Separi, the parish priest of Kaindi-Yarapos-Hawaian visited regularly for Mass and the sacraments as well as for meetings.⁷

Teaching staff at Yarapos – Grafton sisters at hand

The Grafton Mercy Sisters, from the northern rivers area stretching from the north coast area to the western boundary of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales, were a continuous presence at Yarapos from 1970 to 1993. Sister Margaret Bray comments on their initial move to Yarapos:

In 1970 the Grafton sisters volunteered to go to Mercy College Yarapos to enable the Mercy Congregation of the Brisbane sisters to send sisters across to the Minor Seminary

on Kairiru. We were a very small congregation but we volunteered to help the local Church establish its own national clergy.⁸

Educational opportunity for girls

In the 1980s there was an acute shortage of staff at Yarapos, particularly for the upper classes, and the sisters worked extremely hard to meet the demands of increasing numbers of students. Because of the limited opportunities for girls in general in PNG society, and a tight selection process at higher levels of education, many able girls did not have the opportunity of going beyond primary education. Some of these were young Mercy and Rosary Sisters and the Headmistresses of Yarapos offered opportunities to them to complete their high school education.

Mourning the death of Mama Christina, landowner and contributor to women's education

A sad day dawned for the Yarapos community with the news of Mama Christina's death in the early hours of the morning on December 27, 1987. As the sisters had been evacuated to Yarapos from Kaindi during the land compensation disruption, they were present at the time and were able to help with funeral arrangements and transportation for relatives and friends. Bishop Kalisz and Fathers Wand and Heinemans concelebrated the funeral Mass. They report of this in their community chronicle:

So the hand of God was certainly in our moving to Yarapos, so that we could be present at Christina's Mass and funeral to say 'thank you' to her for her contribution to the education of young women of PNG. Some of these young women who have passed through Mercy College Yarapos have been outstanding not only in the service of their country, but also very active in raising the standard of women.⁹

Mama Christina had generously given land to the sisters for the secondary education of girls. With her wide vision she had welcomed girls, not only from the Yarapos area, but from all over the Sepik Province.

Towards localisation

The sisters were able to put a steady localisation program in place. Under the leadership of the following Headmistresses the school developed - Sisters Valerie White (1963-66), Christine Watt (1967-68), Denise Coghlan (1969-72), Abina Looney (1973-76), Maureen Grant (1977-82), Miss Angeline Singiat (1982 Term 4), Maura O'Shaughnessy (1983-mid1986), Carmel McCormick (mid1986-90), Maureen Grant (1991-1994), Angeline Singiat (1995-1997), Mrs Raphaela Bengo (1998-2000), Beverly Whitten (2001 Term 1), Agnes Murphy (2001-onwards).

Significant milestones towards localisation were the appointment in 1968 of the first PNG lay female teacher Maria (Pimong) Siria in 1968, followed by Juliana Pige in 1971. The first PNG lay male teacher, Joseph Valerian, was appointed to the staff in 1978.

First national Headmistress: Sister Angeline Singiat

There was great joy among the sisters when Sister Angeline Singiat, a PNG Sister of Mercy and former student, was appointed Headmistress (1995-1997). Angeline felt she was entrusted to carry on the traditions begun by her former teachers. She mentions the professional and spiritual spheres.

The Sisters of Mercy had a special gift of being great organisers. When they supervised the students they did it thoroughly and properly through every stage until it was completed to their satisfaction. They also believed in the power of prayer – their own, those of the staff and students and their families. As an example, there was once a lot of sickness, and it seemed that there were certain places on the property where the girls would show signs of fear and hysteria. The senior national female staff, Rose Maule, Jill Matui, Marie Bai, Monica Sikas and I turned to prayer. We gathered to have a special prayer ritual at these particular places to pray for protection from illness for the students. Shortly after, the frequent bouts of sickness ceased.¹⁰

Sister Angeline Singiat recalls the early days

From 1966 to the middle of 1995, the western end of the school library was the Headmistress's office and there was a little section for the secretary. The Deputy Headmistress worked in another little room which was previously the kitchen for the Rosary Sisters when they were students at the school. At that time phones were non-existent. Messages were hand-written and taken in by the school driver for him to attend to or deliver. Bernard was the first driver, and the second was Joseph Korowien, a very obliging person and the longest-serving member of ancillary staff.

In the beginning, a small generator was set up to cater for the needs of the students and the sisters. Town power came in the early 1990s. Despite the fact that communication with the outside world was limited, it did occur in written form. Even though the nuns worked under those circumstances, the results of the students were always the best. When I was Deputy Headmistress, if I wanted to see Maureen, I would have to go down to her office. There was no such thing as picking up the phone. We spent our time walking, from one office to another. It did us the world of good, because we were always fit, mentally, socially, spiritually. It was a face to face giving – much better than talking to someone over the phone.

Our first dormitory eventually became the assembly hall. Benedict, a mission carpenter from Saure, was the head carpenter and he worked for Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD, the architect and builder. The first dorms that were built were A, B and C. Then, after that, under the leadership of Sister Abina Looney, Mother Damian donated money and another dorm was built, which on completion in the early 1980s, was christened Damian Dormitory.

In the mid 1990s, by using some of the school's savings and a generous grant from the National Education Secretariat, under the Directorship of Brother Michael Knights CFC, the Mercy Dormitory was able to be built. It happened in 1995, my first year as Head-

mistress that Brother Michael arrived in Wewak by plane and came out to Yarapos to look into the request we had made. He asked to see Sister Francis Readman, the Bishop and myself. After morning tea, we took him to the dormitories and showed him the facilities. We showed him the crowded dorms, with the double bunks, and whilst we were in there, he said, "I'm glad I came to see it for myself."

After he returned to Moresby, he was able to secure a grant so that the dormitory was able to be made with cement, not timber. Mr Ron Fletcher did the plans for the dormitory and Brother Jacques was the overseer in the building of it. The official opening was in 2000 in Mrs Raphaela Bengo's third and last year as Headmistress. It was my suggestion to call it Mercy Dorm. At the time they had it blessed, Sister Fran Readman (Yarapos bursar) sent me a card. "Mercy Dormitory was blessed today. I felt I could not fly you down because it would have been a very expensive cup of tea!"¹¹

Significant improvements were thus planned for the Mercy College Yarapos campus. The students gained a new dormitory and a new administration block was built and opened in 1995.

First lay woman Headmistress: Mrs Raphaela Bengo

In the late 1990s, the school had its first female lay Headmistress, Mrs Raphaela Bengo (1998-2000). This was a significant moment in the history of Mercy College Yarapos. The whole East Sepik Province could see a qualified, capable, energetic and compassionate lay woman running a large educational facility for girls in the tradition of Mercy. Mercy College Yarapos, begun by the Sisters of Mercy, was now joyously handed over by them to be administered by PNG lay leadership and staff, many of whom were highly experienced as department heads and long-serving staff members.

As school bursar, Sister Frances Readman kept the financial records in accurate order and competently supported Mrs Bengo in her leadership. As Sister Angeline recalled, Sister Fran was able to initiate building improvements, such as the Mercy Dormitory. She also drew up plans and organised the building of a five-bedroom staff house and new four-bedroom convent to be constructed beyond the immediate school buildings, thus providing more space for school expansion. This was accomplished in the year 2000, the third and final year of Mrs Bengo's term as Headmistress. The old convent was incorporated into the school complex – its two wings were renovated to provide for a computer centre, named the Maureen Grant Computer Centre, and an education resources centre, embracing the former dining room, library, chapel and kitchen, named the Sister Frances Readman Education Centre.¹²

Sister Fran was able to leave the school with a sound financial backing, and because of this, it was possible to apply for an Australia PNG Incentive Fund Grant for further improvements.

An historical perspective

To date, Yarapos has been one of four schools for girls in the country that have resisted the trend towards co-education. The others are Kumdi in the Western Highlands, run by the Notre Dame Sisters (SND), Marianville in Port Moresby, and Vunapope in Rabaul, both managed by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH). The plant and buildings of these complexes inspire a sense of wonder as one observes the results of decades of dedication and administration of religious women in their planning and construction, and of the responsibilities taken for their maintenance by staff and students.

Despite seasons of floods and drought, and more recently, times of threat and violence ignited by land disputes, Yarapos staff and students have resolutely managed to keep the school in operation. Moreover, despite threats to its existence, the sisters have shared a belief in Mercy College Yarapos as essential for the education of young women in the East Sepik.

A commitment to upper secondary education of Sepik girls

A commitment was made by the sisters at the 1999 Mercy Assembly to keep Yarapos open, and to investigate ways for the school to progress to senior secondary education. The four National High Schools¹³ (for the matriculation years of Grades 11 and 12) seemed to have fulfilled their purpose and were being superseded by the Upper Secondary Schools newly introduced in the provinces as part of educational reform. Consequently, when Mrs Bengo completed her term, and there was a lack of lay persons with the requirements to succeed her as Headmistress,¹⁴ the sisters took on responsibility for guiding the school during this new stage. Sister Beverly Whitton from Grafton was appropriately qualified and returned to keep the school running for the first part of 2001, until Sister Agnes Murphy, newly appointed to the position of Headmistress, was able to begin. When the school was granted upper secondary status in 2004, Agnes became the first Principal of Mercy Secondary School, Yarapos.

However, the move to expand the school buildings to accommodate students and staff for the purpose of increasing educational opportunities at this single-sex institution was fraught with many obstacles, including volatile threats and assaults. While the reasons for this are complex, the outcomes have been very serious, requiring nothing less than heroism on the part of the sisters who bore the brunt of the attacks. In 2004, when it seemed that the school would be forced to close because of disruption to the building project and the likely withdrawal of AusAid funding, former Mercy students publicly raised their voices in solidarity with the sisters and staff, protesting with letters to the national newspapers. Sister Agnes, who was suffering physically from the ordeal, was urged by Dr Jo Taylor CP, the surgeon of Wewak Hospital, to seek urgent medical treatment in Australia.¹⁵ Whereupon Agnes travelled to Townsville and Sister Marie Geddes, Deputy Principal, stepped in temporarily as Principal, at a most critical time in the negotiations. Much needed initiatives of the PNG Incentive Fund Committee and the Provincial Government were able to inject hope and a measure of reconciliation into the situation so that construction resumed, and at the beginning of 2006, educational and building progress was under way.¹⁶

Yarapos Convent

Both the old and the new convents have been a home to Mercy Sisters, not only to those on the staff, but also to those engaged in other ministries. Sisters Anne Frances, Co-ordinator of Religious Education in the diocese, and Margaret Shakeshaft, responsible for the junior professed sisters' formation programs, have resided at Yarapos. Sisters Theresia Tina, a teacher at Yarapos Primary School, and Claudia Apalenda, community health worker undergoing specialist training at Callan Services for the Disabled, Kaindi, have formed part of the community. Yarapos has been a centre long recognised for its hospitality.

PNG Mercy Sisters

Since the unification of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG in 1981, many indigenous sisters have made their home in community at Yarapos, while in formation and after final commitment. Their varying roles have included students (Theresia Gongi, Veronica Lokalyo, Mariska Kua), secretarial duties (Theresa Boyek, Schola Fakiwi), primary school teachers (Petronia Gawi, Mary Nambakwen, Theresia Tina), nurses (Sophie Samiak, Claudia Apalenda), and a high school teacher, Deputy Headmistress and Headmistress (Angeline Singiat). As postulants, Petronia Gawi taught at Yarapos Primary School and Mariska Kua did Grade Eight at the High School.

In the early years, the emphasis was placed on formation in religious life, but later those who had professed final vows took their place and assumed responsible roles within the community. As well as their vital contribution to the ministry, the presence of these young religious has greatly enriched the Australian Mercy Sisters in their understanding of Melanesian values and spirituality.

Early impressions of former staff member and student of Yarapos

The school continued to grow with the added help of lay missionaries and a few sisters from other congregations.

Sister Loyola McGrath: From the Presentation Congregation, Sister Loyola McGrath (1984-1987) recalled her impressions in a conversation at a chance meeting at Wewak airport!

I went to Yarapos, the first college for girls in the Wewak area, in response to a need. The sisters were looking for somebody, as they were short of expatriates to teach the higher grades.

I felt very much at home in the community and shared community life with the sisters at Yarapos and Kaindi and I was very impressed by their hospitality. Val Cervetto stands out very strongly for hospitality and care. There was a great difficulty because of the land problem, but no matter how hard the problem was, and was getting worse, the sisters didn't want to move out.

I learnt from talking and listening to the Mercy Sisters about formation because in that year (1984) we Presentations had our first thoughts of accepting young women. Therefore, the Mercy Chapters and meetings were a great help and I was able to pass it on, and when we started in 1985 we made many references to these ideas. Later when

we had young sisters of our own, we sent some of them to Kaindi and the leadership roles there helped them considerably in leadership skills in the little Aitape Presentation group.¹⁷

Sister Cecilia Hollis: One of the Grafton Sisters on the staff of Yarapos, Cecilia Hollis, made a return visit to PNG for the celebration of the silver jubilee.¹⁸ Sister Angeline Singiat, a recent graduate with a Bachelor of Education degree, was guest speaker. Cecilia was impressed with the influence of the Yarapos ex-students on the development of the young nation, not only in the Sepik, but in other parts of the country. She related her impressions:

I went back in 1991 for the silver jubilee of Yarapos and I was astounded at the roles of so many of the ex-Yarapos girls in the country. We had Anna Solomon who was Editor of the Wantok, and the publisher of that and several other national newspapers, Maria Sarman who was head of one of the departments of the Moresby hospital and Josepha Namsu who was the top lawyer in Moresby. There were so many of our girls who were in major leadership roles throughout the country. They were in so many major roles in politics, in law, in education, and in hospitals. They were involved in all the major aspects of the life, and doing a marvellous job.¹⁹

Sister Agnes Lisban SSPS: Sister Agnes of the Holy Spirit Sisters' community in Mount Hagen, and originally of the Sepik village of Tambanum in Timbungke Parish, tells of the influence of the Mercy Sisters in her life. She touches on her readiness to branch out to the underprivileged herself, and of her links with Mercies in the Highlands. In Agnes' story, we see one of the many examples of the Mercy students making crossings in mercy.

Primary education: *My parents kept me at home till my brother was of school age, so we could go together. I only got as far as Grade 5 because there was no teacher for Grade 6, and most of the time I was home, but in spite of so little teaching I sat for the Grade 6 exam, and I came second and my brother came third. I was selected for Yarapos, not that I was smart, but we came from a very remote school and I was recommended by the Headmaster.*

Making it through secondary education at Yarapos: *When I came to Yarapos I was fifteen years of age. As we speak one language in the Timbungke Parish, Tok Pisin was not spoken. When I arrived I realised I was far behind in academics, Tok Pisin and spoken English, and I tried not to worry because I knew if I did, I would never make it. Then I saw my father bringing me food – he wanted to bring something special from home, and he had walked for two days, then got a PMV (local bus). I said to myself: "If my father cares I will make it!" I soon began to realise that even if the people from towns and cities were advanced in spoken language, I could learn as much as I could by keeping quiet and listening. There were many bright girls from Grades 7 to 10. I knew that I was an average child and I would not have made it up there, so it was the way the sisters taught and cared in school that encouraged me. Sister Maureen Grant was Headmistress and she and the sisters were fair, and there was no system of favouritism.*

In Grade 8 there was the selective system. Though I was not aware of that at the time, the sisters were working for the betterment of women and cared for the underprivileged. I didn't feel underprivileged in the material world, but in the academic side. I was surprised to see that I was selected to do Grades 9 and 10.

Kaindi Teachers College: Later I applied to Kaindi Teachers College, but only after deciding that joining the police was not for me! When I went out to do my Practice Teaching at Thomas' School Yangoru, the sisters there were very kind to me, especially my field lecturer, Sister Desma Clarke.

Early teaching with the Mercies in the Simbu: After graduation I joined the Mercy Mission of the Christian Brothers, offering to go to the very remote places. I chose to go to Neragaima in 1981, where I met Sister Elizabeth Miller and Sister Joan Adams. The sisters were kind to us – Martha Akau and myself – both graduates from Kaindi. When they went to meetings they asked us to care for the elderly priest, Father Willie Bohlen and look after the house. Sometimes on Sunday we were invited for supper in the convent. Sister Rita was Catholic Education Secretary at the time – she was extremely kind when we needed to go to town or for the teachers' retreat she would call over the tele-radio, sending a car to pick us up and when we had no place to go to she would accommodate us in her house.

Anticipation of celebrating the work of education of the Mercies in Wewak: The Mercies never made us feel that girls should join them – never. The sisters in Wewak have the most respect that you can give because most of the women – I can't say all – who are holding higher positions now, are from Yarapos. Sister Angie Singiat was one of them, Yambunpe at Holy Trinity Teachers College is another. The jubilee celebrations in Wewak next year are going to be something really big.

2007 Jubilee Celebrations at Mercy Secondary School

The Jubilee of the Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak Diocese was celebrated by staff and students of Mercy Secondary School with youthful exuberance, beauty and graciousness and the contribution of significant sisters of past years was fittingly recognised. A delight and surprise to all guests was the allocation of sisters' names to the impressive new buildings.

Sister M. Valentine (1963-66) – Valentine Dormitory, Sister Christine Watt (1967-68) – Christine Dormitory; Sister Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan – Brian Mary Assembly Hall; Sister Abina (Martinus) Looney (1973-76) – Abina Dormitory; Sister Maureen Grant (1977-82, 1991-94) – Maureen Grant Computer Centre (in the former Mercy Sisters sleeping quarters); Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy (1983-86) – Maura O'Shaughnessy Rural Technology Building; Sister Carmel McCormick (1987-90) – Carmel Dining Hall; Sister Angeline Singiat (1995-97) – Angeline Administration Centre; Mrs Raphaela Bengo (1998-2000) – Raphaela Bengo Dormitory; Sister Agnes Murphy (2001-) Agnes Murphy Library; Sister Marie Geddes (2004-05) – Townsville Science Building; Sister Frances Readman (1991-2001) – Sister Frances Education Centre (located in the front wing of the former sisters' convent).

An evening celebration of the liturgy in the church at Yarapos was an occasion for the pilgrim sisters from Australia and the PNG Region to join together in a spirit of thanksgiving. The congregation of Yarapos students raised their strong, choral voices in prayerful songs of hope. These were the same sounds that had lifted the hearts of the sisters over the previous decades and they offered their pilgrims prayers for the future of these valiant young women stepping into the future in Mercy, guided by their teachers.

Endnotes

- ¹ Taken from records in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ² From an interview with Sister Christine Watt in Brisbane, circa 1999.
- ³ Long grass-cutting knives.
- ⁴ From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁵ The high schools of some other churches used them as well so that the content became progressively ecumenical, rather than just Catholic.
- ⁶ Reported in a taped interview circa 1998.
- ⁷ A tentative list of names of chaplains was completed by Sister Angeline Singiat in May, 2006.
- ⁸ From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.
- ⁹ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yarapos, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.
- ¹⁰ Material compiled from a conversation with Sister Angeline in May 2006.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*
- ¹² From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yarapos in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.
- ¹³ Sogeri, Aiyura, Keravat and Passam.
- ¹⁴ Especially in the circumstances of the proposed development of upper secondary education, in line with the Educational Reform.
- ¹⁵ The Sisters of Mercy owe much to Doctor Jo Taylor, CP (surgeon from England) as she has provided crucial medical treatment and advice over many years.
- ¹⁶ The details of this were shared with me at Yarapos by Sister Marie Geddes in May, 2005.
- ¹⁷ This chance meeting with Sister Loyola McGrath occurred in May, 2005.
- ¹⁸ This celebration was held on August 22, 1991.
- ¹⁹ Taken from a report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.



MERCY COLLEGE – MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOL YARAPOS (1966-2006)

Founding community

Christine Watt, Valeria (Valentine) White, Maureen (Augustine) Grant, Philippine Connors,
Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan – all from Brisbane, and Mae (Bernard) McMurrough from West Perth.

Christine (St Christine) Watt	Claudia Apalenda	Theresa Boyek
Margaret Boyle	Margaret Bray	Mary Alberta Bussutin
Anne Frances (Martha) Carroll	Carmel Carroll	Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll
Patricia Carroll	Margaret (Margarita Mary) Clinch	Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan
Isobel Condon	Philippine Connors	Miriam Devine
Bernadette Eckersley	Francis Regis Everingham	Schola Fakiwi
Wendy (Gonzaga) Flannery	Maureen (Xaveria) Flynn	Petronia Gawi
Marie Geddes	Theresia Gongi	Maureen (Augustine) Grant
Margaret Graham	Nola Gray	Anne Hannigan
Cecilia (de Porres) Hollis	Judith Hourigan	Mariska Kua
Veronica Lokalyo	Abina Looney	Joan MacGinley
Carmel (Vera) McCormick	Ann (Gerard Mary) McGill	Agnes Murphy
Mae (Bernard) McMurrough	Ann (Peter Mary) O'Regan	Mary Nambakwen
Than Thuy Nguyen	Maura (Josephus) O'Shaughnessy	Patricia O'Shea
Elizabeth Pepom	Frances Readman	Colleen Rhodes
Maria Jean Rhule	Sophie Samiak	Margaret Scroope
Margaret Shakeshaft	Angeline Singiat	Mary Stallard
Theresia Tina	Helen White	Valerie (Valentine) White
Beverly Whitton	Sebastina Yangen	



BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO ST BENEDICT'S TEACHERS COLLEGE, KAINDI (1969-)

When a small group of sisters moved from Kunjingini to Kaindi to expand the teacher education program, no-one could have predicted the vast influence this move would have on the educational opportunities of men and women throughout the entire East Sepik Province. At the time of independence, this province was considered educationally disadvantaged, but gradually, because of the increase in teachers (and therefore student numbers in the schools) provided by St Benedict's Teachers College, the educational opportunities and standards throughout the province markedly improved.

Founding sisters

The founding sisters were Francis Regis Everingham (Superior and Head Teacher of the Demonstration School), Margarita Shannon (Deputy Principal and Lecturer) and Valda Cervetto, (Music Lecturer and Liturgy, Household and Catering Manager). These were three of the original band of sisters at Kunjingini. Margarita had been appointed by Mother Damian, not only as a teacher, but also as a pharmacist, who could make up the medicines that were unavailable in the remoteness of Kunjingini.



Mercy Founders, Kaindi: Sisters Francis Regis, Margarita Shannon and Val Cervetto.

St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi – a new start for teacher education

The beginnings and development of Kaindi are clearly explained in early records by the co-founders of the teachers college at Kaindi, Brother Graeme Leach CFC (Principal) and Sister Margarita Shannon (Deputy Principal).

Brother Graeme Leach reported that the original diocesan college at Kunjingini, established in 1957, was closed in 1968 to make way for the establishment of a joint, regional, inter-diocesan college in Wewak.



Br. Graeme Leach CFC,
First Principal of St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.

By signed agreement the dioceses of Wewak, Aitape, Vanimo and Daru ratified their decision to establish an "inter-diocesan Teacher Training College"... The signed agreement of the four bishops provided the moral and legal basis for the new joint venture in establishing the College.

The College was under the management of the Christian Brothers (CFC, Queensland) working in conjunction with the Sisters of Mercy (RSM, Brisbane). These two congregations, as the "contract religious congregations, undertook to provide a core of staff which the four dioceses were to supplement through recruitment and contribution of personnel".¹

Early days and the building up of Kaindi

For the first three months, the sisters were accommodated at Yarapos and travelled out each day in the yellow combi bus. When the Yarapos classrooms were built, one of them was used for the sisters' accommodation. Sister Margarita Shannon continues her reflections:

Life for everybody was a challenge during those early months. Sister Val and a helper cooked the students' meals in a small shed, with a roof and no walls. To get there she often had to walk through water up to her knees.

The new College started with a group of 70 residential students, both men and women, enrolled in a two-year course, offering them a certificate in primary teaching. Those who had at least secondary education were entitled to study for a "B" certificate (middle primary), while those who had reached Form 4 were admitted to the "C" Course (upper primary).

Getting the grounds into some kind of order, was the work of many years. Brother Graeme Leach, the first Principal at Kaindi, had a vision of what he wanted the campus to be, but achieving it was not easy. The land had been used as a vegetable garden by Japanese soldiers during the war, and furrows were still evident. The floods came more often then, until Brother Leach and Brother Cleary, with the men students, dug a very deep drain, almost a little canal, at the back of the College, beyond the present boundary. There

were no concrete paths in those days, so very often we were all walking through water. At first there was no tractor to cut the grass and lawn mowers were out of the question, so everyone had plenty of practice using a grass-knife.

During the first building period, there were also teams of casual labourers cutting bush, clearing tree trunks and digging ditches². In the first twelve years of accepting students, St Benedict's, Kaindi, enrolled 1,000 men and women to prepare them as primary/community school teachers, through higher level pre-service courses.³

Sister Margarita continues her reflections of the early years

In thinking back to the tutorials, my memory is one of striving for excellence. Nothing was acceptable unless it was good. From the start, students prepared their blackboards at the College and carried them with them to the schools.

When Catholic schools and colleges became part of the newly formed National Teaching Service, in 1971, conditions for everyone became much easier. Teachers in the field now received the same salary as teachers in government schools, while all tertiary students were given a fortnightly allowance for personal needs and text books.

Through the assistance of Brother Hubert Umlauf SVD, the procurator at the Central Wirui Mission, early funding for the College was obtained through Misereor [German Funding Organisation], and through their generous donations all the buildings for lectures for the College were erected, including the dining room, Great Hall, dormitories, library, clinic, Science block and staff houses. Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD, the main builder, was assisted for a number of years by lay missionary builders and plumbers from New Zealand, Basil Doherty, Allan Smith, John Whitcombe and Jerry Noris. They put up new buildings, as well as a unique spiral staircase in the library, and we owe a great debt of gratitude to them. The College chapel, a very beautiful building, was the gift of the German bishops. It is set in the middle of what has become a very attractive campus. 1991 marked the beginning of a three-year course in teacher education.⁴

The pioneer sisters

Brother Graeme recorded the contribution of the early sisters – Margarita, Val and Francis Regis. In his reference to Sister Margarita, he drew upon the professional comments made in an official letter from the Director of Education, Konedobu.

Sister Margarita Shannon

In Sister Margarita the mission has one of the most able and experienced of people engaged in teacher training. This was an assessment of Sister Margarita when she was Principal of the diocesan college at Kunjingini before ever she came to Kaindi. As well as performing her duties as Deputy of the new College at the same high level, Sister Margarita spent hours with the Principal on project submissions and lists, in decision-making, typing, and ordering. The daily attention to finances, the clinic, and other details, as well as the taking on of strategic work and positions for the good of the College during transition times, were all further evidence of her dedication and service.⁵



Sister Val in the first kitchen, Kaindi.

Sister Val (Philip) Cervetto

For some months, Sister Philip and her girls Agapina Tambe (Palimbai) and Roberta Jambui (Wombun) cheerfully cooked in the mud (or dust) under an open lean-to, while the rest of staff although working under difficulties, had at least a floor and a permanent roof; conditions never made any difference to Sister Philip's complete and unselfish giving of her time and energies over the years. In collaboration with Father Wim Valckx and Sister Wendy Flannery she prepared for publication "Ol Singsing bilong Lotu Katolik". Together with Carmel McCormick, she has compiled a book of English hymns [Sing to the Lord and Praise Him] and has participated in the teaching of liturgical music in the College.⁶

Mother Francis Regis Everingham

For some months as the first Headteacher of the Demonstration School, Mother Francis Regis supervised her teachers and classes located partly in the College Administration Block (3 classes) and partly at St Francis Parish Youth Centre Hall (four classes). In the

first week, a complete school assembled – Prep class to Standard Six and classes were underway despite the fact that no buildings stood on the demonstration school site for some months.⁷

Staff of St Benedict's Teachers College

Sister Margarita continues her recollections of the staff of the College, including the Sisters of Mercy:

The College has been staffed by Christian Brothers, Sisters of Mercy and lay people, assisted at times by religious sisters and brothers from other congregations. Some of the lay staff are Papua New Guineans, quite a number of whom are graduates of the College, while others are members of volunteer organisations such as AVA (Australia), CUSO (Canada) and VSA (New Zealand).

Over the years Sisters of Mercy have played a vital part in the growth of the College. They have been instrumental in assisting national sisters to gain a foothold in teacher education, under the Associate Lecturer Program, and have been a guiding force for other young sisters doing their pre-service training. The first professed Papua New Guinean Sister of Mercy, Petronia Gawi, is a graduate of St Benedict's and a former teacher in the Demonstration School.⁸

Kaindi sisters' involvement

The sisters' investment in teacher education and the expansion of Kaindi has been in evidence for more than a quarter of a century. Sisters have been in management positions as Deputy Principal – Margarita Shannon, Joan O'Toole, Moira Cleary and Irene Masterson. They have served as heads of department, as lecturers on the staff, collaboratively written curriculum guides, and supervised and promoted national staff. For three years, from 1999 to 2002, Irene Masterson was deputy under the leadership of the national Principal, Leonard Kiminja. For a short time, she took on the role of Principal as a temporary measure.

As in other situations during the period of localisation sisters sometimes withdrew from positions of administrative responsibility. For example, after retiring from duties as Deputy Principal and lecturer, Sister Margarita Shannon ably set up the College Library. Her successors were Sister Vonnie Clarke and Sister Anna Rohan. When Vonnie returned a second time during the information technology age she instinctively recognised the potential of three previously untouched and mystifying computers (!) and competently set about the task of a successful computerisation of the library.

Not all sisters were in promotional positions of leadership. Many were lecturers working side-by-side with national staff and supporting the ethos of the College. They had their specific skills and talents to offer. To give an example, Sister Christin McIntosh from Parramatta came for two years (1974-1975), to specialise in Primary English Method. Christin noted with a sigh of satisfaction, that at the end of her term, her position was localised.⁹ The then Principal, Brother Graeme Leach CFC commended her contribution:

Sister McIntosh made a major input into the development of the English Curriculum of the College, being responsible for the Method Strand. The Curriculum itself presents evidence of her professionalism... Particularly noteworthy has been her work with the student-teachers in the area of remedial English.¹⁰

The demonstration school: Sisters of Mercy, including Mother Francis Regis and Sister Brendan Daly, have served as head teachers and demonstration teachers at the Kaindi Primary Demonstration School, and in their leadership role, they were dedicated to the process of localisation. In the earlier years, Sister Brendan was instrumental in a number of Rosary Sisters completing their primary education in order for them to proceed to Mercy College, Yarapos.

Religious Education: In seeking to promote contemporary methods of teaching religious education in line with Vatican II directives the Sisters of Mercy took a leading role in writing and trialling new approaches in curriculum materials, and in promoting national staff to responsible positions within the religious education departments. The approach which was followed by the religious men and women teaching in the Catholic teachers colleges¹¹, was based on nation-wide goals expressed by the bishops and made known generally through the Sub-Commissions for Catechetics.¹² Sisters Carmel McCormick, Bernadette O'Dwyer and Margaret Shakeshaft were exceptionally gifted teachers and influential in this area. Similar initiatives in religious education were carried out by the sisters in Holy Trinity Teachers College¹³, and Sister Carmel Martin wrote and conducted courses for lecturers in all the Catholic teachers colleges.



Sister Carmel McCormick at Kaindi.

Sister Carmel McCormick worked on the Sub-Commission for Primary School Catechesis¹⁴. This committee, which was led by Genevieve Bühler in Madang,¹⁵ was responsible for the Primary School Religious Education Syllabus, the *Skul Katolik*¹⁶ text books, and the Sacramental Program materials. Carmel was responsible for the Syllabus and *Skul Katolik* Books for Grade Four.

Outreach with teachers and catechists in the field

Sister Carmel McCormick did the groundwork in Religious Education in Catholic and Administration¹⁷ Schools throughout the Wewak Diocese. She explained the process used to spread the teachings of Vatican II to as many teachers, catechists and students as possible. Carmel begins by referring to writing the materials for Grade Four:

Originally, I worked with a team of talented East Sepik Teachers and then put it all together. The Syllabus was the starting point, but it was a working document and subjected to many changes as the books were written and the lessons tried. Later it was refined with all the additional information necessary for use in schools and teachers colleges. Sister Bernadette Dwyer and Margaret Shakeshaft also taught Catechetics in the teachers colleges, but there were others before us – Sister Abina Looney, Nola Gray and others.

*The Wewak Diocese appointed Father Clem Gawlik SVD to take care of Religious Education in the Wewak schools in the early 1970s. I joined him in 1973 and took over the catechetical side of things while he concentrated on the religious formation of the teachers. I translated the *Skul Katolik* materials into Tok Pisin so that the local catechists also could use it as a valuable resource. I know the catechists at Tangugo Pastoral Centre were glad of it when they came to Kaindi to learn how to use the *Skul Katolik* Materials.*

Later Brother Canute¹⁸ took over from Father Clem, and we were joined by Sister Anne Frances in the 1980s. My role in the meantime had been to teach in the teachers college and on three days a week travel around the schools supervising and helping the teachers with Religious Education.¹⁹

Some painstaking work has been done in the sisters' spare time. The first Tok Pisin Hymnal (*Ol Singing Bilong Lotu Katolik*) was formatted by Sister Wendy Flannery and the music notation was laboriously done by Sister Val using a croquet hook indented on a wax duplicating stencil.²⁰ This was printed by the Liturgical Catechetical Centre in Madang in 1972. The second Tok Pisin Hymnal²¹ was printed in 1973 by the National Liturgical Catechetical Centre, Alexishafen,

Madang. Wendy and Val stayed awake all night to finish it on time for Father Wim Valckx to take to Madang the next morning. Sister Carmel McCormick typed the Kaindi English Hymn Book (Sing to the Lord and Praise Him) while she was on twelve months leave in Australia in 1981. The music notation was done by Sister Val and the book was published by Wirui Press, Wewak. The English Hymn book was used by the dioceses of Aitape, Goroka, Lae, Madang, Vanimo and Wewak and later spread to the islands.

Cluster system of practice teaching

St Benedict's Teachers College introduced a cluster system of supervision in the Yangoru, Kunjingini and Dagua areas. This innovation was to give the teacher education students the opportunity to face the reality of life and practice as a teacher in rural primary schools, and has been mentioned appropriately in regard to Kunjingini.²² The long-term commitment sisters made to help the different groups of students realise their own goals and fulfil the college requirements was challenging and constant. Such a role required respectful and harmonious relationships with headmasters, staff and local community. This practice continued for more than 12 years until deteriorating social conditions made it unsafe for students and staff and the system was modified. Through the dedication of the Mercy Sisters, including Sisters Bernadette O'Dwyer (Kunjingini), Desma Clarke (Yangoru), Irene Masterson (Yangoru) and Dominique Coles SSpS (Dagua), this innovation offered practice teaching students ongoing supervision and a very close experience of the life of teaching in the various agencies within the National Education System.

Teacher education of women

Since its beginning in 1969, St Benedict's pursued a vigorous policy of the promotion of women students and was the first teacher education institution in the country to have equal numbers of male and female students. The institution has remained faithful to this policy in contrast with other tertiary institutions where equal numbers of female enrolments have not been maintained. This outcome may well be due to the supply of graduates from Yarpas and the success of the equal gender policy practised by the sisters in all their schools. One of the stories among the sisters is of Mother Francis Regis' encouragement and persistence for parents to send one girl with each boy for enrolment in primary education.

Sister Margarita comments in her report about the participation of women at the College:

One very strong tradition in the College that has always been dear to my heart, is the earnest effort that has been made over the years to ensure that women were given equal opportunities with men, and that, as far as possible, numbers of men and women enrolled were comparable. This reflects one of the main ideals in the Constitution of this country.²³

Student government was revolutionary in the sense that women students were given equal responsibility and status with the male students. Their responsibilities, like that of the male leaders, extended to all organisational areas of student welfare.²⁴ Mercy Sisters took a leading role with the female students. For several years, Sister Irene Callanan, while on the academic staff, was also dean of students, and spent time after hours informally counselling students in their living quarters. When Irene moved to other duties, including financial management of

Callan Services, Sister Irene Masterson combined the role of dean of women for seven years with her other teaching and administrative responsibilities in the College. This duty on behalf of women students was later followed briefly by Sister Sophie Samiak when she was working as a nurse in the Kaindi clinic.

Sister Irene Masterson recalls:

One can have anxious moments with sick youngsters, particularly with malaria and rising temperatures. In tropical areas like Wewak, a person can fall dangerously ill, quickly and without warning, putting a huge burden of responsibility for care on the shoulders of the one in charge. When the students had raging temperatures or were seriously ill, I somehow managed to leave the College, visiting them several times a day and spending nights trying to get their temperatures down. Many were the anxious hours I spent waiting at the hospital with very sick students. At such times Brother Matthew²⁵ was untiring in his dedication and support.²⁶

National perspectives

Bougainville students in crisis. It is important to note that the Catholic Church managed three of the nine teachers colleges responsible for primary teacher education. Though each was inter-diocesan in organisation, in time, the students were selected from all provinces within the nation as the institutions worked within the regulations and perspectives of the National Department of Education. A stated aim was to bring students from all over the country to educate them about the other provinces and to build a sense of nationhood. It is not surprising that in the aftermath of the Bougainville crisis, support came from the Catholic teachers colleges. According to Sister Irene Masterson, St Benedict's stepped in to provide places for the disadvantaged male and female students whose secondary education had been disrupted by the closure of schools on the war-torn island. Thus during the late 1990s the Bougainville students began to trickle back. Sister Irene was profoundly moved by a statement from one of the students: "You don't know how terrible it was to be hiding in the jungle all those years!"²⁷

The refugee students. The refugee camp on the Vanimo border had grown to the size of a small city. There were no schools. It was arranged that four students a year would come to the College to learn and improve their English with the understanding that they would go back to teach in the camp. St Benedict's staff devised special programs to help the students succeed in these difficult circumstances. Brother Terrence Kelly CFC took a leading role in this.²⁸

Teacher Education and ministry for Disabled Persons

Brother Graeme Leach, the first Principal, introduced the new venture of Callan Services for Disabled Persons, in 1991. This soon grew to an impressive complex, extending to other institutions²⁹. Children suffering hearing loss and impairment were taught sign language and given equal opportunities in primary and secondary education. The sisters were quick to respond and contributed by presenting lectures and tutorials on learning with disabilities and inclusive education. PNG Sisters of Mercy who were nurses, Sophie Samiak and Claudia Apolenda, attended courses to become proficient in diagnosis and treatment of eye and ear

diseases. Sister Irene Callanan spent several years as financial manager of the Callan Services until the position was localised. In all, Sister Irene served on St Benedict's for 18 years.

Working with Callan Services, Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy was involved in HIV/AIDS education in the Wewak and Bougainville Dioceses before being contracted with the East Sepik Provincial Government as overall Care and Counselling Co-ordinator responsible for the HIV/AIDS programs. Based at the Diocesan Sepik Centre for Hope, she worked within a PNG team and took a leading role in encouraging national team members. In the case of conducting week-long programs in remote parts of the province, Maura led by example in the preparation and loading of teaching resources and food, road travel and make-do village accommodation. Sister Margaret Roni also formed part of the team conducting HIV/AIDS programs.

In 2004 Sister Patricia Weekes introduced a different approach to ministry in Callan Services³⁰. Her involvement was based on an agreement, termed a 'covenant', to signify a bond of fidelity and constancy, rather than a 'contract' which could be more easily broken. Patricia works on behalf of the Mercy Centre, Lavington, NSW whose philosophy is related to learning together to dialogue across differences, such as intellectual disability, psychiatric illness, drug and alcohol addictions, emotional disturbances, post-traumatic stress, and contributing to Third World peoples. Patricia is working to overcome the cultural stigma attached to persons with disability and to build up mutual relationships of understanding and appreciation across racial divides.



Sr Irene Callanan and a student at St Benedict's.

Collaboration in ministry

The sisters worked in collaboration with the Christian Brothers under the leadership of Graeme Leach and the various Principals – John Stevenson, Peter Harney, Andrew Simpson, Vince Stallard and the first lay Principal, Leonard Kiminja. This cooperation in ministry extended, at appropriate times, to the regional Leaders of the Christian Brothers, Brothers Barry Louisson, Graeme Leach, Phil Redding, Andrew Simpson and Vincent Duggan.

The sisters as justice and peace figures

Father Brian Byrne SVD, one of the early chaplains and a former student of the Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane, reflected on the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia. He claimed they were prophetic figures in the Church, setting high standards in health and education for over 100 years until the government 'caught up'. They continued the same trend in Papua New Guinea.

They were the initial justice and peace figures for a century and I went up to New Guinea and I found exactly the same thing going on. They had pretty rough conditions, as they had in Brisbane. You had people like Margarita Shannon – she stands out as a person who really put education on the map in Wewak – and there were other sisters there too, and then it was the same thing for health care. They set the standard that the government had to live up to, and we haven't recognised that because we always relegated what they were doing to 'corporal works of mercy', that wasn't the mainstream activity of the Church. The mainstream activity of the Church was forgiveness of sin and reconciliation, which it still is, and which it should be – a sacramental Church – but what the sisters were doing IS part of the mainstream activity of the Church, the proper mission of the Church, and it is only since Vatican II that we've done it... Our task is to bring the Kingdom of God on earth – through the corporal works of mercy, through justice and peace in all these areas, not just to find our way into heaven. It's a whole shift of emphasis, but the Sisters of Mercy were doing it for a hundred years, but it was relegated to secondary status, but it's not, it's mainstream and I think it has to be recognised. Victoria Crosses have to be handed out posthumously!³¹

Kaindi – Central house for the Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak Diocese

The sisters could not have foreseen that the Kaindi convent, which had been built by the diocese in 1969, would become the central house for the increased numbers of sisters in the various communities of the Wewak Diocese in the 1970s and 1980s. Sisters from the rural mission stations found a welcome base after travelling the dangerous roads (subject to flooding and vandal attacks) to Wewak for supplies, or for health reasons.

In addition to the early Mercy communities at Kunjingini, Torembe, Yangoru, Ulupu and Yarapos, there were several other foundations during the 1970s and 1980s at Negrie, Kairiru and Dreikir. There were also some sisters living in very small communities. All of these found Kaindi a welcome place for hospitality.

There have been historic Mercy Assemblies held on the Kaindi campus. From 1980, National Assemblies were held here, accommodating the entire number of sisters from the Highlands (Goroka, Simbu, Mount Hagen and Enga) and the Coast (Wewak, Aitape, Rabaul, Madang and Port Moresby). The first combined meeting towards unification was held on the campus in 1980 when the Aitape Task Force sought formal inclusion among the PNG Mercy foundations. During such occasions, the Australian leaders offered their support (and expertise) in paving the way in a practical sense towards the ideal of Melanesian Mercy. Each succeeding Assembly witnessed the increasing presence of young PNG sisters who taught their Australian sisters the

depths of Melanesian cultures where there was no divide between the sacred and the secular, and the divine embraced all aspects of human life and the world of nature.

A particularly significant time was in April 1980 when Sister Anne McLay introduced the new Constitutions for the first united Australian group. It was also at this gathering that Petronia Gawi, Theresia Gongi and Veronica Lokalyo were accepted as postulants. There have been other occasions, such as retreats for all the sisters, the junior professed or the novices. For example, former Mercy Sisters in PNG, Margaret Bubb and Bernadette Eckersley, using their professional expertise, led the sisters through the 'call to Mercy', and Sister Ursula Gilbert conducted a Mercy spirituality retreat there (and in Mount Hagen) in January 2004.

Liturgical celebrations in St Benedict's Chapel

Kaindi Chapel, within its peaceful setting, has been the home of many vibrant and moving liturgies from its earliest days. Over the years, the choirs of students have raised their voices in tune with the rich tones of Sister Val's organ and have added their own cultural musical instruments to lift people's hearts and minds in prayer. One cannot help but wonder how many students have used their creative imagination and youthful energy in song, musical accompaniment, drama and singsing processions, blending the richness of their Melanesian heritage with Christian worship! In her role as Head of the Religious Education Department, Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer spent time after hours with individual students helping them to lead the *Komunio Lotu*, a Eucharistic service commonly held in village communities and conducted by Eucharistic ministers where no priest was available for regular Sunday liturgies. Bernadette inspired many young men and women students with her firm belief in, and creative suggestions for, lay participation in the Church. Sister Margarita speaks of a tradition and sign of the students' real involvement in the liturgy of the Church.

Drama, liturgical dance and colourful posters have always marked the big feastsdays of the Church, as well as the Sunday Masses. The Holy Week and Easter liturgy each year have become a time of really entering into the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection. It is also pleasing too, in more recent times, when priests are not always available, to see students leading Communion liturgies. All of these activities not only enrich one's spiritual life, but are also valuable learning experiences for teachers, who must be prepared to take an active part in liturgical functions, in areas where few people have had the advantages of a Christian tertiary education.³²

Kaindi – a place of welcome, and of refuge

The Kaindi welcome has been extended to many friends that the sisters made over the years through their various ministries. These included the mission personnel from the diocese and those in transit to Aitape. Brother Matthew Bouton SVD was a much appreciated visitor as he assisted the sisters in the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses contracted by the students.

Kaindi has been a centre for empowering women religious of the Wewak Diocese. Meetings have been organised by Mercy Sisters who have taken their share of responsibility for executive positions with the Union of Women Religious of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The sisters, some of them victims of crime and violence, used a united voice through public demonstrations and the media to speak out bravely against issues of increased crime, lawlessness and violence against women. There is no doubt that violence is an endemic social issue and sadly, there were occasions when the sisters suffered serious assaults and permanent disability while travelling on the roads or walking to the villages in their everyday ministry. At such times, Kaindi became their haven and place of recuperation. Two of the sisters, themselves victims of violence, had the courage to help others face issues of violence, including how to respond to those suffering from violence and dealing with forgiveness.

Novitiate – Catherine’s House

The story of the formation of the novitiate at Catherine’s House, the residence acquired through the generosity of the Bishop of Wewak and St Benedict’s Administration, will be told in Chapter 10. However, the crucial, vibrant interconnections in community and ministry of those responsible for formation, the young sisters and the Kaindi community, deserve a brief mention here. These interconnections continued for more than 20 years (1980-2001). Moreover, the beautiful Kaindi Chapel in the centre of the campus was the ‘holy ground’ for the ceremonies of Profession and Renewal of Vows of the national Mercy Sisters, and for some silver jubilee celebrations of the Australian sisters. The chaplains of St Benedict’s, especially Father Joep Heinemans SVD, and other religious priests and brothers of the diocese, contributed their time and expertise to the formation programs. Other significant priests who supported the novitiate program were Bishop Michael Marai, Father John Momis, Father Geoffrey Brumm SVD and Father John Dwyer SVD.

When circumstances led to the Mercy novices joining the program of the Presentation Sisters under Sister Felicity Corder at Aitape – as if in the shoes of Catherine McAuley at George’s Hill in Ireland long ago – Catherine’s House was given a new and worthy purpose.

A new purpose for Catherine’s – Mercy Education Program

Kaye Bolwell undertook the task of providing secondary education for young women, including sisters and young women interested in the Mercy way of life. How this came about is recorded in the document “Mercy Education Program Policy”³³.

For many years there has been an acknowledgement of the need for education, especially for women in Papua New Guinea, and various sisters have searched for ways to maintain programs. In the late 1970s a formal CODE (Distance Education) program was started by the sisters at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen [and carried out by Sister Helen McDonell and Mary Eamon Brennan]. This program which continued for about 10 years served in assisting with the upgrade of education of the women interested in joining the Sisters of Mercy. In 1981 an informal education program was also established in Wewak. About this time too a group of interested women was sent to study at Our Lady of Mercy College, Yapos. In 1985 the right wing of Catherine’s House was opened as a CODE centre and the ministry was later extended to include assisting prisoners in Boram gaol.

The Sisters of Mercy Leadership Team, aware that more and more women are seeking to upgrade their studies, is now seeking to develop a policy that will be a guide to enable

a study program to be set in place for both internal and external students.

*The Mercy Education Program is not an initial training program for women to become Sisters of Mercy. Like Catherine, the Sisters of Mercy are willing to assist the women who in one way or another have been deprived of receiving formal education.*³⁴

It is in accordance with the goals of the program to provide opportunities for the upgrading of the education levels of the sisters to qualify them for entry to professional programs for their future ministries. Sister Emma Awehi, working part time in elementary education within the Callan Services, and Robina Eide continued their secondary studies through the Mercy Education Program.

The land dispute

One very severe trial for staff and students has been the problem of disruptions caused periodically by land disputes. Despite efforts of the Catholic Church to seek justice for the landowners, the problem has flared up with threats to the campus residents, particularly the sisters and brothers, sparking fear, distress and danger. Brief accounts were recorded in the sisters' chronicle³⁵ and reported in the newspaper³⁶:

The Saure people delivered a letter at approximately 4 pm on Monday 9th December, 1987. The letter, also sent to various other officials, demanded immediate transfer of the land, and, if not, the ultimatum that we – all people living on the Kaindi campus – be off the premises by one minute past midnight on 23 Dec. Enquiries revealed that the portioning of the land had not been gazetted by the Lands Department, and the delay had aroused the Saure people.

Kaindi Teachers College will have to be closed if an ancient feud between the traditional land owners and the Catholic Church in Wewak is not resolved before the 1988 school year.

The sisters were among a number of people who were forced to leave St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi near Wewak just before Christmas. Local landowners gave the College staff just 13 days notice of their intention to occupy the site. Now the College buildings are empty, guarded by the police, as the land owners camp in the grounds.

The dispute goes back a number of years. The land on which the College stands was freehold, acquired by the Catholic Church under the German administration of New Guinea. Until it was drained about thirty years ago, it was almost entirely swamp.

Back in the 1950s the landowners challenged the lease in the courts and lost. In the face of renewed land claims, the Church decided to surrender the freehold lease back to the government in order to apply for a mission lease. This happened over a year ago but the change has still to appear in the official gazette. When it does so, the landowners will have 90 days to launch a fresh appeal. As it is the landowners have grown impatient with the government dragging its feet and decided to take direct action for themselves.

Negotiations involving the landowners and the National and Provincial Governments were initiated by the Christian Brothers, Peter Harney and Graeme Leach, and Bishop Raymond Kalisz, to remedy the problem. These attempts were successful for a time, but the Kaindi land problem, like so many other land claims within PNG, due to differing conceptions of land tenure, has tended to resurface, causing serious tension to all on the campus. In the mind of PNG citizens, land is inalienable.

Brigid Yambunpe's Mercy connections – Yarapos, Kaindi, Holy Trinity

Brigid Yambunpe, who did her primary schooling at home in the Chambri Lakes area, was offered a place in Yarapos in 1974. After four years at Yarapos, Brigid went to St Benedict's, Kaindi for two years, then on to Marienberg to teach for four and a half years. Within a short time, Brigid was selected to go to Gaulim Teachers College for further training to start her Diploma in Tertiary Teaching. Degree studies were completed in a split-campus program between the University of Papua New Guinea and the Canberra College of Advanced Education. In 2005, Brigid gained her Master's in Education through Extension Studies with Charles Sturt University, NSW. Her story continues:

When I was at Yarapos (1974-1977) and even at Kaindi (1978-1979) where Sister Irene was the Dean of Women, I didn't realise all the things that they were saying and doing for the girls. Our Mercy College motto at Yarapos was: You must always be a valiant woman, and once I got to Kaindi I realised I had to be a valiant woman. If I feel something is wrong, it is my responsibility to speak up. I must be independent. If I hadn't gone to Yarapos I wouldn't be this independent.

The sisters at Yarapos who influenced me were Sister Abina, Sister Wendy, Sister Brian Mary, Sister Ann O'Regan, Sister Maureen Grant, Sister de Porres (Cecilia Hollis), Sister Maura, Sister Marie Louise, Sister Judith, Sister Alberta and Sister Margaret from Grafton and Sister Regis who was quite old at that time. At Yarapos – they were teaching us to work like both men and women. We did our own carpentry and I was a painter, spending my time doing the roofs, mending lawnmowers and cutting grass. I was told never to pull the lawnmower back, but you must always go forward. I was in the maintenance group. We used to maintain our own sewerage system using buckets of water, with Sister Maura digging the pit! As well as education, they were helping us to develop as a whole person. Only afterwards did I realise the value of the knowledge and skills. How powerful their influence was – to develop a life of prayer. The environment was spiritually rich. It's only when I'm out here that I realise they did a lot for us.

At Kaindi the ones I remember well were Sisters Irene Masterson, Desma, Bernadette, Irene Callanan (our Dean), Margarita, Margaret, Carmel, and Sister Valda Cervetto for the Music. Sister Irene was the Dean and she and Bernadette O'Dwyer were helping me to cope in adult society with men. She would have meetings with us reminding us of survival skills in a co-ed environment, preparing us to live as adult women. I had this knowledge, but Sister Irene was there to guide us applying that knowledge in a real context in practical ways of sitting, dressing, behaving and adapting to different situations. One thing the sisters would say to us. You're from Yarapos – you should be a valiant

woman – reminding us that this was the training, and you had to use it now. They were giving academic training, plus very good personal training as well.

I remember the sisters at Holy Trinity – Sister Valda, Ellen Dunn, Helen MacDonell, Carmel Carroll, Pat O’Shea, Helen White (who was my lecturer at Kaindi and we were lecturers together here), Sister Vero Lokalyo and Sister Josette McDonell. When I first came they welcomed me and looked after me. They said: “You’re one of our girls from Yarapos”. They helped me to cope with another phase in my life as a lecturer and I would go and ask for help with lesson plans.

Now I carry out these Mercy traditions within myself. One example is I show girls how to walk quietly. As Dean I pass on the advice of modest dressing. I encourage them to take their equal part in class, to talk when they have to and to work hard and develop independence. I think it is important to tell the young people about Jesus, and we can model Christ to them.

Is it important to have Mercy Sisters around? There’s only Sister Angie. I don’t know what sisters have – Sister Agnes was tough, but there was effectiveness, commitment, promptness in dealing with things. I was lucky when I came to Holy Trinity Teachers College in 1986 there were many sisters. When Sister Agnes was here, the College had spiritual force – you could feel there was a spiritual environment. She helped the College to maintain the spirituality of this place, through her administrative responsibility.³⁷

St Benedict’s new tertiary status

St Benedict’s continued as a major establishment, progressing from Certificate to Diploma in Primary Education status in 1991. New directions on an impressive scale were taken when it qualified for amalgamation with Divine Word University Madang in 2003. In August of that year, Brother Alfred Tivinarlik CFC, PhD, was appointed the first Pro-Vice President of the Divine Word University - St Benedict’s Campus.

Celebrating 50 years of Mercy Sisters’ involvement in Teacher Education

In 2007 St Benedict’s celebrated their founding by Sister Margarita Shannon and the Sisters of Mercy in Kunjigini fifty years ago in 1957. The theme adopted was: Mercy Sisters Jubilee and 50 Years of Teacher Education in East Sepik, June 2nd, 2007. There were many memorable events on the program, but one, in particular, captured the fifty years in a special way.

Many lecturers and former students took part in a simple, but impressive march past, organised according to years of involvement. As the Kunjigini pioneer Sisters Val Cervetto and Bridie Fennessy took their place at the head of the line and stepped forward to the powerful beat of traditional drums, they were followed by pioneer Sister Mary Wildie and many early sisters – Margaret Rush, Joan Hooper, Jacinta Wiedman, Carmel McCormick, Irene Callanan, Irene Masterson and others. At various stages along the moving time line, different ones joined in. These included Father Peter O’Reilly SVD, Mission Education Officer at the beginning of

the era, who shared the vision and had the drive to supervise work on the new Teachers College; Brother Graeme Leach CFC, the first Principal; Gerard Buzolic CFC, long serving staff member; and Alfred Tivinarlik CFC, today's dynamic leader of St Benedict's. It was very moving when the PNG Mercy sisters and other religious and lay people took their place. The national lecturers, particularly those in positions of responsibility, swelled the ranks, offering an impressive picture of the localisation of the university campus. The marchers formed an unforgettable line of religious educators, carrying on the traditions of St Benedict's inspiring motto of 'prayer, study and work'.

Endnotes

- ¹ Taken from documents provided by Brother Graeme Leach in May, 2005.
- ² The land was very swampy and needed to be drained. Despite the improvements the campus is still subject to flooding after heavy rains.
- ³ Sister Margarita offered this information as guest speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November, 1990.
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ In a letter to the Mission Education Officer, Catholic Mission Wewak (dated June 10, 1964, Ref. M/12-269) Mr L. W. Johnson, Director of Education, wrote from Konedobu.
- ⁶ Taken from documents provided by Brother Graeme Leach in May, 2005.
- ⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁸ Sister Margarita offered this information as guest speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November, 1990.
- ⁹ In an interview with Sister Christin McIntosh in Parramatta, circa 1999.
- ¹⁰ Written on November 17, 1975 and signed by G.J. Leach, BA, BEd, MEd, MACE – Principal, St Benedict's Teachers College.
- ¹¹ The Catholic Teachers Colleges were St Benedict's Teachers College (Wewak), Holy Trinity Teachers College (Mount Hagen), Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (Kabaleo) and St Paul's Vunakana (Rabaul).
- ¹² The Sub-Commissions for High School Catechesis and for Primary School Catechesis.
- ¹³ Sister Margaret Shakeshaft was on the Sub-Commission for Primary School Catechesis in the Mount Hagen and Enga Dioceses before her appointment to St Benedict's Teachers College, Wewak.
- ¹⁴ Sister Wendy Flannery at Yarapos, while on the Sub-Commission for High School Catechesis, wrote High School Religious Education materials which were used in all Catholic high schools in PNG. The high schools of some other churches used them as well, as the content became progressively ecumenical.
- ¹⁵ The members were Brother Finian Markwell CFC (Rabaul), Sister Monique (Bougainville) and Sister Carmel McCormick RSM (Wewak).
- ¹⁶ The Catholic schools' books for teachers.
- ¹⁷ Carmel taught religious education in the Administration Schools, including Brandi High School, Wewak.
- ¹⁸ Brother Canute Sheehan CFC.
- ¹⁹ Extracted from an email communication from Sister Carmel McCormick, April 20, 2007.
- ²⁰ Information provided by Sister Val Cervetto in a conversation in June, 2007.
- ²¹ This hymnal, also entitled *Ol Singing Bilong Lotu Katolik*, was published for the diocese of Aitape, Goroka, Lae, Madang, Mount Hagen, Vaimo and Wewak. The first printing in 1973 was 5,000, the first reprint in 1977 was 3,000 and the second reprint in 1980 was 3,000. Today these books are used extensively in Catholic Churches throughout PNG.
- ²² See Chapter 4.
- ²³ Sister Margarita's report mentioned above.
- ²⁴ The leadership roles have been referred to by Sister Loyola McGrath (Presentation Sister) in her comments on Yarapos.
- ²⁵ For several years Br Matthew Bouten SVD was Catholic Health Secretary in Wewak, and his medical advice was valuable particularly in the case of sick students at Kaindi and Yarapos.
- ²⁶ Taken from an interview with Sister Irene Masterson in Cairns, May, 2005.
- ²⁷ Taken from an interview with Sister Irene Masterson in Wewak, June, 2007.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*

- 29 Callan Services at centres attached to the Mt Sion Centre for the Blind at Goroka, the Primary Teachers Colleges at Kabaleo and Mount Hagen, and the University of Goroka.
- 30 Interview with Sister Patricia Weekes in Wewak in June, 2007.
- 31 From a conversation at the administration centre of the Divine Word Missionaries, Epping, circa 1999.
- 32 From Sister Margarita's speech as Guest Speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November, 1990, mentioned above.
- 33 Extracts from a Sisters of Mercy document regarding this educational project, offered by Sister Kaye Bolwell at Kaindi, in May, 2006.
- 34 *ibid.*
- 35 The chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kaindi, December, 1987.
- 36 The Times, Week 14, January 20, 1988, p. 14.
- 37 *ibid.*



St Benedict's chapel, Kaindi.



ST. BENEDICT'S KAINDI (1969-)

Founding Community

Francis Regis Everingham, Margarita Shannon, Valda Cervetto.

Betty Angalapai
RoseMary Baker
Irene Callanan
Desma Clarke
M. Brendan Daly
Petronia Gawi
Nola (St Gregory) Gray
Abina Looney
Irene Masterson
Theresia Nakankwien
Patricia O'Shea
Helen Pili
Margaret Roni
Margaret Shakeshaft
Helen White

Claudia Apalenda
Kaye Bolwell
Misericordia Carter
Vonnice Clarke
Francis Regis Everingham
Margaret Graham
Ann Hook
Joan MacGinley
Carmel McCormick
Bernadette O'Dwyer
Joan O'Toole
Christine (Maria Assunta) Riordan
Anna Rohan
Margarita Shannon

Emma Awehi
Val (Jude) Birchley
Valda (Philip) Cervetto
Maira Cleary
Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy
Maureen (Augustine) Grant
Angela Kaima
Pauline Masters
Christin (Christopher) McIntosh
Ann O'Regan
Elizabeth Pepom
Bernadette Rodgers
Sophie Samiak
Theodora Talili

Ministries

Teacher Education Management and Staff, Dean of Women, Religious Education Curriculum Writing and Teaching, Supervision of Teachers, Hospitality, Health Care, Demonstration School administration and teaching, Practice Teaching Supervision in the Clusters throughout the diocese, Librarianship, Elementary Education, Prison Ministry, Pastoral Work, Financial Registrar, Callan Services. HIV/AIDS.

Sisters from other congregations who have lived at Kaindi

Verda Kraemer(OSF), Noela Leamy(OSF), Helen Lieffering (OSF), Margaret Maladede FMI,
Caroline Pile FMI, Marilyn Soeder DW, Maria Verkhoover BVM



Chapter 6

WEWAK CROSSINGS AFTER 1970

Independence was the highlight of the decade of the 1970s. It was a time when Mercy ministries were expanding to accommodate the new needs of a developing independent nation. The changes of Vatican II were inspiring new initiatives in mission and the sisters responded enthusiastically. In the Wewak Diocese a new foundation was made by the Townsville Congregation at Negrie (1970). Two others were made as a small band of sisters crossed the Bismarck Sea to teach at St John's Seminary, Kairiru (1970), and an even smaller community of two sisters moved inland to engage in pastoral ministry at Dreikir (1979).

Tangugo, Kairiru, Morning Light, Wirui (Wewak), Passam, Maprik, Negrie - Townsville,



I N D E P E N D E N C E • 1 9 7 5

Drekikir, Angoram, Kambot-Angoram (Sepik and Keram Rivers).

FROM AUSTRALIA: TOWNSVILLE MERCY SISTERS TO NEGRIE (1970-1980)

By 1970, the Sisters of Mercy, Townsville were dotted over a large area of North Queensland from Proserpine on the coast to the far west of Winton. Yet, despite their numbers being spread thinly, this congregation made a foundation to Negrie in the Wewak Diocese and supported a community there for ten years. Two Townsville sisters, Annunziata and Marie (Leonie) Williams, had spent some years at Torembi, and Sister Nina Barra had taught for four years with the Rockhampton sisters at Yangoru. Marie was now to lead a small band of sisters to the tiny and compact mission station of Negrie, nestled on sloping tropical grounds and closely surrounded by the village.

Townsville sisters' decision to come to Negrie



Mother Pius visits Negrie.

To understand how this venture had come about, we turn to the sisters' chronicle:

How did St Catherine's Convent, Negrie, come to be? An act of the Chapter, 1968, at St Patrick's, The Strand, Townsville, suggested the establishment of our first mission. Bishop Faulkner gave his blessing. So, in July 1969, Mother General, Mother Mary Pius, and Sister Mary Philippa (Councillor and in charge of the Mission Commission) came to Wewak. Bishop Leo Arkfeld directed Mother's attention to Negrie - a station three miles from the Rockhampton sisters' foundation at Yangoru. Negrie had a newly-built clinic (brick - fibre) which could easily be converted to a convent. Negrie it was. Volunteers were called upon Mother's return to Townsville and the four names announced at the end of July.¹

The founding sisters set out on their journey

The founding sisters were Marie (Leonie) Williams (Superior), Nina (Josephine) Barra, Rose (Giovanni) Pelleri and Jean (Louis) Murray.

The sisters received their mission crosses from the Bishop of Townsville, Leonard Faulkner, at a concelebrated Mass in St Joseph's Church prior to leaving from Townsville via Cairns for Wewak on February 3. At Wewak, they were met by Sister Nina Barra who had prepared the Negrie convent, and the sisters from Yangoru who had helped her, the sisters from Kaindi and



Marie Williams



Nina Barra



Rose Pelleri



Jean Murray

Yarapos as well as Father Shadeg SVD, the parish priest of Negrie. After Mass at Yarapos, the sisters called on the Bishop at Wirui, then boarded the plane for the 15 minute ride to Yangoru airstrip, before the 'historic' jeep ride to their own front door.²

Arrival in Negrie

The arrival of the Townsville sisters at Negrie is recorded in the journal written by the Leader of the pioneer group, Sister Marie Williams.

Wednesday afternoon, 4th February, 1970 we arrived at Negrie. Father Werner Shadeg had driven over to Yangoru to meet us, and he and Father Kelly drove us and the five Yangoru sisters over a very slippery and bumpy road to our new home. The Yangoru sisters, Philomena, Josephine Mary, Marie Bernard, Camillus and Celestine, had our convent in apple-pie order. During the previous six months, three of these sisters with Sister Sarto and our own Sister Mary Josephine, had painted the convent inside and out. It looked a very professional job.³

Father Shadeg brought us the Blessed Sacrament that first night into our really beautiful chapel. When our guests had gone we went to the chapel and sang Mother of Mercy. Our first Mass at Negrie was the following afternoon. Father offered the Mass for us and our communities at home. Although Sister Josephine had ordered all the necessities of

*life six months before, still on our arrival we possessed no chairs, no tables, no fridge, no freezer, no stove, no boiler. We had beds and a few presses and Yangoru lent us chairs and a table. We borrowed Father's primus till our gas ring arrived. For the time being the sisters at Yangoru made our bread for us.*⁴

Beginnings in the primary school⁵

After a day of collecting the government tax and enrolling the pupils, the sisters opened the school year with 200 pupils, noticing with disappointment the small number of girls – about a quarter of the whole. Two indigenous teachers, Gregory and Albert Toni taught the junior primary and the sisters took the middle primary. As the school had lost its registration, there was a lot of work in every department to be done to regain the registration. The sisters had their first Parents and Citizens Meeting (P&C), and Sister Stancia came over from Yangoru to explain the implications to the people. The children gathered stones and sand from the river to be used in the making of the cement for the floor of the new mathematics room.

In the second year, the school enrolment increased to 270 children. Two female teachers, Maggie and Alphonsa, joined Albert and Matthew on the staff. A new bush materials classroom and two new fibro buildings with iron roofs had been added. Caspar, the church councillor, was a 'tower of strength' to the sisters in persuading reluctant villagers to let their girls come to school.⁶

The government overhauled the road from Negrie to Yangoru and it was a great improvement. However, an interesting phenomenon was noted in the sisters' chronicle:



*Our road is near perfect now. With the removal of all the sand our river has changed course! As it flooded the other day we watched a huge bread-fruit tree on the other side swaying backwards and forwards as the water tore at its roots. Finally, it fell across the river making a perfect bridge. Now it doesn't matter how much water is in the river - the children can always cross. So can we!*⁷

The introduction of 'cultural activities' in the curriculum

By 1972, with the prospect of only about one third of the students advancing to high school, 'cultural activities' were introduced into the curriculum to train the students for life in the village. The parents had been asked to help and various ones came in to the school to teach the children blind making, pottery, grass skirt making and bead work. Sister Louis began taking her class to various villages to hear stories from the old men and to learn something of the history of the place. The children then recorded these stories. Agriculture was also introduced in the school curriculum.



Efforts to save the art of the 'singsings'

The efforts of the sisters, teachers and parents to keep the skills of the traditional *singsings* were recorded in the sisters' chronicle in 1972:

There was a school children's singsing lately at Yangoru for the district. There's a great danger that the art of the singsings will be lost, so efforts are being made now to encourage adults to teach the children. They come in here night after night for practice. It's a beautiful sight to see a mother and her small daughter dancing. They are particularly light on their feet and their movements are so graceful. The actual performance requires many hours of immediate preparation. Certain leaves are boiled and rubbed into the skin for a certain singsing 'perfume'. It is a picture to see the old men with brushes and paints turning the faces of the children into works of art. A daub here, and a line there, with all the concentration of an artist at work.



On the mission station

Four excerpts from the sisters' chronicle show the priest's initiatives with the teachers and parishioners on the mission station. The significant role, hard work and enjoyment of the sisters is evident in the first example; the priest's role and sensitivity in making the liturgy meaningful for the people is portrayed in the second and third excerpts; and the sister's role in the religious and spiritual development of the students is shown in the last example.



Preparing for a meal together. We had tea with all the teachers one night. Father invited the teachers and their families, Caspar and his family, dear old Martina as well. The setting for the tea was in Father's back yard. We prepared the food together with the other women – all local food. We chopped up all sorts of leaves and things from the bush, mixed with the young shoots of wild sugar cane, boiled in coconut juice, rice also cooked in coconut oil, taro, and corn. We cooked in large pots over open fires, and while all was cooking, Father said Mass for us here, with all of us sitting on mats on the ground. It was all very beautiful, though strange. The people were very much at their ease and it was a really wonderful experience. We mean to repeat it.

Preparing for the sacraments. Father Shadeg was preparing a number of people for the sacraments. Ninety people – adults, children (including some of the school children) and babies were baptised in the church. About 120 adults were gathered in two sessions in the church every Wednesday for instruction in preparation for Confirmation. Father used the new Pidgin Rite in the Easter ceremonies and the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday was very moving. There was a good deal of dialogue between Father and members of the congregation throughout the ceremonies and it was evident that this made the ceremonies really meaningful to the people.

Preparing for National Day. For National Day celebrations in 1972 there was a special Mass in the church attended by a very large congregation. At the Offertory one child from each village walked to the altar carrying the name of the village, followed by a lady carrying a large bilum on her head full of taros and yams, a gift from the village. These were later sold and the money sent as a donation to the hospital in Wewak. After the Mass Father blessed the new flag and it was solemnly hoisted.

Preparing for First Communion. Sister Giovanni's (Rose Pelleri) first communicants were beautifully trained. They made a procession coming into the church holding lighted candles decorated with flowers, the girls with their mothers behind them and the boys with their fathers. At the Offertory they each placed a small written prayer of their own on the altar. For the breakfast they sat on the floor of the Maths room and ate their fish and rice. They were not at all self-conscious as it is so natural for them to sit on the floor.⁸

Beginnings of pastoral work inspired by the Self-Study

As well as the work of the school, the sisters visited a different village each month to say the Rosary with the people. Literacy classes were attempted but the people did not keep up the good attendance they showed in the beginning. On the other hand, Marie's Friday afternoon sewing classes with the women proved popular. In 1972, with the approval of Bishop Arkfeld and the General Council in Townsville, Marie resigned from being Head Teacher and began full-time pastoral work with the village women. By now, the school had gained its official government registration and Jean Murray took over the responsibility of Head Teacher.

Marie's work started with village work, "taking wads of material out, and saving up and buying sewing machines, making bread and all those kinds of things, having sports between the different groups. And then it moved into setting up our own training centre for the deanery – Ulupu, Maprik, Kunjingini and training church leaders and prayer leaders".⁹

Encouraged by the Vatican Council and the Self-Study of the Church, the priests had a keen pastoral approach. Father Patrick Rasmussen from the Rockhampton Diocese and Father Patrick Gesch SVD were soon joined by enthusiastic young Divine Word Missionary seminarians, Roger Schroeder and Michael Knight, who were engaged in their overseas training program. Sister Cheryl Camp reflects on this unique approach to ministry.

What I think was significant for others, and especially so for us Mercies at Negrie was the teamwork between the priests, ourselves and the seminarians. We planned and worked and ate together and this provided a richness of community that was unique. They were the halcyon days of pastoral ministry and what I learned in those years still influences my missionary activity today, 30 years later. What has also endured are the friendships we formed with each other in those days.¹⁰

Unique team approach to pastoral ministry

Caught up in the fervour of the Self-Study, the team developed a sound team system of pastoral visits to all the villages of the parish. Most of this was done on foot in a hilly area and in the afternoon tropical heat, so as to be with the people during the late afternoon and evening. They would arrive at the village, have discussions with the people – the sisters with the women and the others with the men – followed by a Eucharistic celebration. Marie recalls that at first, it was not uncommon for a woman to dart suddenly from the women's circle across to the men's group to check out a response to a question and return satisfied with the right answer! The women's confidence grew with each session. Topics for discussion were related to the Self-Study and were an attempt to draw upon the people's lived experience within their culture to deepen their sense of God's loving presence in their lives.

Father Pat Gesch describes the sacramental aspect of these visits and the role of the sisters:

Then we would have Mass, usually just sitting on the playground for preference, at a number of different places within the village. Confessions would be heard prior to Mass. In the later years, the sister always had the job of getting the reader prepared, arranging for the prayers before communion, and of getting a singing leader, and perhaps someone to do the penitential service at the beginning of Mass. I found it good, later on, to get the church leader to go around with the hosts and have people put in a host if they were going to communion.

I definitely got the impression that there are things a man does in a parish, and things a woman does. She comes to help the people in the parish. A man cannot go to the women about personal things. When he asks deep questions a man may be sending out the wrong messages. With the sisters the women found it easier to give an answer as they were not shy, or embarrassed.¹¹

Supportive links with Townsville

Mother Pius, Leader of the Townsville Congregation, showed a keen interest in the foundation and visited annually. Her support and trust was much appreciated by the sisters, particularly when they moved into pastoral ministry in 1972. Routine conventual life underwent rather sudden changes as sisters adjusted to the times and places so as to be more available to the people. New arrangements were made so that the sisters would periodically stay overnight in the villages. The sisters received valuable support from the visits of Sister Marie Therese Langan who succeeded Mother Pius in 1975.

Sisters received visits from the Bishop of Townsville, Bishop Leonard Faulkner, who accompanied them in their ministry. On one occasion he also stayed in a village house at Soli Antap – sleeping on coconut leaves on the floor. Bishop Faulkner wrote of his visit:

During April (1973) it was my privilege to pay a brief visit to our sisters working among the Sepik people at Negrie in the Diocese of Wewak. I was most impressed by the genuine Christian spirit of the sisters and by the work they are doing for the people... My visit to Negrie convinced me of the great value of the work being done by our sisters. They are giving an education to three hundred children in an area where only about one-third of the children receive any schooling. Sister Leonie also does missionary work by visiting the villages and working with the mothers and other women in the villages.¹²

Mercy gatherings

Negrie became a vibrant centre for many visits of the sisters and others involved in pastoral ministry. The sisters' commitment to one another through Mercy get-togethers and celebrations is seen in the following entry, taken from the sisters' chronicle.

Sister Philip's Jubilee was to be held in Wewak so all the Mercies went in from the bush. About 15 of us got as far as the Lagum to find it a roaring torrent. We all about turned and headed for Sassoya – possibly to spend the night. We were in Father's truck – ran out of petrol on the way as the gauge wasn't registering. Also lost the exhaust pipe. Father Bill Burrows was in residence at Sassoya. He was a very amiable host to his unexpected guests. A few of us went back to the river at 11 pm but it was quite impassable, so we all settled down for the night, mostly on the floor. We were a little anxious about the river as we had the Jubilarian, Sister Philip, with us and Mass was to be celebrated the next morning at 7! However we made it by 6.30 am.¹³

The cargo cult

However, at this time, the people had competing religious interests because of belief in the cargo cult. A cargo cult is a belief in a period of heaven-sent wealth and prosperity here on earth. The people expected their ancestors to be instrumental in sending them goods – money, food, tools, luxuries, equipment, furniture and means of transport – which Europeans had intercepted. These goods would become available to them if they acquired the secret knowledge to access their ancestors, thus preventing their wealth going to the Europeans.

The Bishop of Wewak decides on the sisters' evacuation

Bishop Arkfeld, concerned for the safety of the sisters at Negrie and Yangoru, advised the evacuation of the sisters to Wewak. The sisters trusted their own people but could not be sure how the many outsiders who had come into the area for a public protest, objecting to the government land markers that had been placed on Mount Turu, would react to them.

In their journal, the sisters recorded the incident and their relief to see their station unharmed on their return:

On the 7th July itself we were worried about the fate of our people and our mission. Thank God there were no incidents. Daniel [Hawine, the cult leader] had complete control as he had promised he would. No one was allowed to take arms of any description with them on the 7th. The markers were removed in silence and handed from hand to hand from the top of Turu to the Govt office at Yangoru. The members of the cult stretched all along the road – about 10 miles. The only sound heard was the saying of the Rosary... At the end the crowd quietly dispersed.

The people accepted Father's explanation that we were only 'meris' so he had to look after us by getting us away from the crowds of strangers.¹⁴

Father Herman Janssen MSC, founder of the Melanesian Institute, who was interested in researching the deep religious meaning of the cargo cult visited Negrie in 1972.¹⁵

Saddened by the death of a prominent church Leader

One of the sisters recalls with sadness the sudden death of a prominent church leader, Markus Kenua.

He was not an old man, maybe forty, and when the cargo cult was on he was able to walk the line. He was a very good church leader, yet he was high up in the cargo cult. But very, very balanced. He was an extraordinary man. For me he was the hope for the Church at the time, with his great kind of wisdom. He could resist community pressure... he could do that and remain in command, almost. He was an extraordinary man.¹⁶

Negrie sisters' crossings for community and ministry

The Yangoru and Negrie sisters enjoyed a sisterly bond. This dated back to their tertiary student days when the Sisters of Central (Rockhampton) and North Queensland (Townsville and Cairns) were engaged in external studies at James Cook University in Townsville. Close connections were forged when they got to know one another on the vacation courses and these friendships were renewed in the mission setting at Yangoru and Negrie.



Communities of Yangoru and Negrie.

Indeed a collaborative approach to ministry was essential, especially at the beginning of the sisters' work at Negrie, when Nina Barra left Yangoru for Negrie. Later on Carmel King from Negrie took over Stancia's work at the Yangoru Vocational Centre and Cheryl Camp from Negrie taught for a time at Yangoru High School.

Called further afield in the deanery and diocese

The sisters were being called beyond the parish ministry. In response to Bishop Arkfeld's request for a missionary to join the staff of the Maprik High School, the Townsville Leader, Mother Pius, asked Sister Marie if she would be willing to apply for the position as no Brisbane sister could be released for this ministry. Marie agreed and taught the high school curriculum, including Rural Science and Religious Education. Trying to manage the teaching at Maprik with a mid-week overnight stay with her community at Negrie involved considerable travel. Consequently, the task of teaching at Maprik was taken on the following year by the sisters at Kunjingini.

By 1974, when localisation of the primary school was accomplished, the sisters made adjustments in ministry. Carmel King went to the Yangoru Vocational Centre. Yet the sisters' chronicle seemed to make light of the demands of the physical labour, personal adjustment and Carmel's undoubted domestic and technical skills, particularly in the all-important expertise of maintaining and mending sewing machines. The chronicle states: "Carmel learned how

to make bread, and to cook it in the drum ovens. The girls at the Centre were more than anxious to teach her all the things they felt it necessary for her to know". Cheryl joined the staff at Yangoru High School with Sister Margaret Houlihan from Ballarat. At the end of 1975, Marie was appointed to Wewak to teach at the Tangugo Pastoral Centre. Programs were offered for catechists, women intending to take up catechetical work, and for a small group of married catechist men who were preparing for the diaconate. Their wives and children were with them so that the whole family would understand something of the nature of this ministry. Sister Alberta Busuttin prepared for her work in the apostolate of the Youth Centre Vocational School while teaching at Yrapos. Sister Josephine Martyn engaged in work with women in the villages of the Negrie parish.

Training centre for prayer leaders

Supported by the Bishop, Sister Marie set up a training centre at Negrie for prayer leaders in the deanery which promoted basic Christian communities as the new model of Church. Father Joep Heinemans SVD, chaplain of St Benedict's Teachers College Kaindi, was very much in favour of this new pastoral dimension of plurality of leaders, an idea which had come out of the Self-Study. Consequently, leadership courses were held for prayer leaders, church leaders and catechists; understandably, these programs included women.

Courses were also held in the various parishes of the deanery. Cheryl Camp, Josephine Martyn and other sisters became energetically involved in planning and teaching the programs which were conducted for the three areas of the deanery – Negrie, Kunjingini and Dreikir. A young Rosary Sister, Coronata Tumburme, was part of the teaching team, particularly in programs with the women. The sisters also guided her in Retreat work, village visitation and recording¹⁷. The courses were followed up with implementation in the villages, and the Divine Word Missionary seminarian, Roger Schroeder, was a key figure in carrying this out.

The sisters leave Negrie

The last years at Negrie were difficult but satisfying ones for the sisters. They had localised the school and the time was fast approaching to do the same with the Church Leaders' Centre. Father Caspar Tolmai, a PNG priest, took charge of the parish. Cheryl, who had taken a prominent role with Marie in the planning and management of the Centre, was asked to be Director of Xavier Institute in Port Moresby for 1982. She was busy preparing and writing the courses for the new director and teachers of the Centre. She records:

I have been living at Yangoru since February 1981, and working at Negrie each day, driving over the three miles. I've been working with a catechist, Abraham Nambaik, training him in the work of directing the Maprik Deanery Pastoral Training Program. In August he will move to another mission station, Kunjingini and take over this work.¹⁸

One of the classrooms of the school had been burnt down and there were elements of lawlessness on the roads and in the villages. Under these conditions, there were not enough sisters to make up a viable community or to continue the village pastoral work or ministry with women. The circumstances in which they worked had changed too, because the original priests, who based their pastoral ministry on a team approach with the sisters, were replaced. It was the end of an era but the dawn of localisation and the development of new approaches to

suit changing circumstances. Meanwhile, Cheryl and Carmel spent their last year at Yangoru. Their phase of mission in this Yangoru-Negrie area was completed when they handed over to the Rosary Sisters at the end of 1981.

Support from the Townsville Diocese

The sisters were generously supported by the Townsville Diocese and entries in the sisters' chronicle indicate their appreciation for these gifts and the prayerful support of their Australian friends. Some examples are taken from the chronicle:

*Mr and Mrs Jack Gleeson; sisters and students, Home Hill
Repairs and renovations to Negrie Church
Water tanks and shelters for Bukientuon and Parina villages
Sisters, Mater Hospital Townsville
Medical goods used for treating sick and injured in Negrie
Townsville St Vincent de Paul Society, Belgian Gardens
Used clothing for the needy (that means almost everyone)
Ingham St Vincent de Paul
Medical goods and clothing for sick of Negrie and Aitape
Hospital
Mr and Mrs Thomas Camp, Mr A. Camp, Mrs Beryl Camp.
Freight for used clothing, sewing table for Bukientuon Club
Catholic Women's League of Lucinda
Driver's licence for Catechist
Lourdes Primary School Ingham, Santa Maria Girls' High, Ingham
Water Tank at Negrie¹⁹*

Reflections on the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie (1970-1980)

Archbishop Emeritus of Adelaide, and former Bishop of Townsville, Leonard Faulkner, reflects on the mission of the Townsville Sisters of Mercy at Negrie:

As Bishop of Townsville I was privileged to be involved in the decision of the Mother General and the Townsville Mercies to send Sisters to Negrie. In fact, the whole local church supported the Missionary Sisters in Papua New Guinea. It was good for us to be part of a 'Mission'.

The Townsville Mercies were pioneer missionary Sisters – the first to live in Negrie in deprivation and isolation. They built up the school, with children walking enormous distances for an education. They also interacted with the local people with new ideas and hard work! Whilst at Negrie the Sisters had to cope with the 'Cargo Cult' phenomenon – in fact, for their safety, Bishop Arkfeld arranged for them to be evacuated to Wewak for a time.

I was proud of the Sisters and a few times went with them – on one occasion to Soli-on-top for a pastoral visit and Mass. The teaching and spirit of the Second Vatican Council was evident in the work of the Negrie Sisters who, together with the Priests, entered wholeheartedly into the 'Self Study' programme of the church of Papua New Guinea. This was enhanced by the 'Team work' with Priests, Seminarians and local people – especially the Catechists.

As Bishop I received great encouragement in my Ministry from the Sisters of Mercy and especially from the Sisters at Negrie.

Leonard Faulkner

Archbishop Emeritus of Adelaide²⁰

Endnotes

¹ Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie, written by Sister Marie Williams.

² Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Townsville.

³ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ As summarised from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Communicated in a letter, circa 1999.

¹¹ Extract from an interview, May, 2005.

¹² From a mission report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Townsville.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Archival information of the Sisters of Mercy was supplemented by the personal experience reported on 23rd June, 2007, by Sister Coronata Tumburme, now an experienced pastoral worker at Sikoro Parish in Enga.

¹⁸ A personal entry in the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

¹⁹ Taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

²⁰ Personal communication by email, March 26, 2007.



NEGRIE (1970-1980)

Founding Community

Marie (Leonie) Williams (Superior) Nina (Josephine) Barra, Rose (Giovanni) Pelleri
and Jean (Louis) Murray.

Nina (Josephine) Barra
Alberta Busuttin
Carmel King
Jean (Louis) Murray
Marie (Leonie) Williams

Christine Bisley
Cheryl Camp
Josephine Martyn
Rose (Giovanni) Pelleri

Rosary Sister at Negrie

Sister Coronata Tumburme

Ministries

Primary School Teaching, Religious Education, Pastoral Ministry, Women's Clubs,
Management of Training Centre for Pastoral Workers and Prayer Leaders in the Deanery
and the Diocese, Visitation and Hospitality.

Ministries beyond Negrie

Teaching Pastoral Ministry (Tangugo), High School Teaching (Maprik and Yangoru),
Vocational Centre (Yangoru).



BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO KAIRIRU (1970 -1993)

In 1952, Bishop Arkfeld opened St John's Minor Seminary¹ on Kairiru, an island north of Wewak, where his predecessor, Bishop Loerks had established the diocesan headquarters. Some years later, Bishop Arkfeld founded the Sacred Heart Brothers (1957)² and the Rosary Sisters (1958). His major purpose was localisation of the Church – training future PNG priests, brothers and sisters to take the place of the overseas missionaries.³

Bishop Arkfeld appeals to Mother Damian

In 1969 when the seminary was understaffed and there was a need to raise the educational standards with the impending nationalisation of the teaching service, the Bishop made an urgent appeal to Mother Damian, Mother General of the Brisbane sisters, for staff. His request was for two sisters to join the Kairiru teaching staff. At the time, the sisters were just getting established at Mercy College, Yarpas and St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, and only by taking sisters from the bush station communities of Kunjingini, Torembi and Ulupu, was Mother Damian able to make up the numbers for a small foundation. She and the sisters shared the Bishop's vision for the growth of the local Church.⁴

The founding sisters were Misericordia Carter (Superior and Head Teacher of St Martin's Primary School), Maureen (Augustine) Grant and Loyola Boyle (Secondary School Teachers) and Jill (Raymond) Stringer (Nurse at St Martin's Clinic).

The focus on teaching and formation of the seminarians was the prime reason for the sisters' presence, but the small community soon addressed the education and health needs of the entire parish, both in Kairiru and Mushu.

The extent of Kairiru Parish

The administration of the parish of St Martin's was divided into three areas – the first two on Kairiru and the third on Mushu Island – which was situated somewhat to the west between Wewak and Kairiru. Public notice for parish activities and maternal and child health (MCH) patrols would be taken to the villages by word of mouth, as *Tok Save*,⁵ by the church leaders

and catechists. The Kairiru parish areas were separated by mountain slopes, treacherous to walk over during the wet season. Because of the fertile soil throughout the island, the people



Aerial view - Kairiru.

were able to grow good vegetable gardens, particularly on the 'front' side opposite Wewak. This was more suitable for the preparation of sago, which, with a plentiful supply of fish, formed the staple diet. People on the 'far' side had some land on the 'front' side and resided with relatives to prepare their sago.⁸

The sisters' convent

The convent was not completed when the sisters arrived. The builder, Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD, who was also busy with constructing school buildings at Yrapos, was not able to complete the task for some time. Brother Michael Weiskamp SVD, an elderly brother who was both builder and carpenter, later kept everything in running order. Father Kalisz SVD built the hydro-electrical plant which was the envy of almost every other mission station in the country, except for Denglagu, where a similar plant had been constructed harnessing the headwaters of the Simbu River in the Highlands.

Kairiru crossings

Transport was hazardous in every way – by air, sea and land. Access to the island was by plane, normally a five-minute journey from Wirui airstrip, but the passage was rough and the landing problematic because of the fierce cross-winds and the narrowness of the air strip between St Martin's Church and St Xavier's High School (run by the Marist Brothers). Because of the difficulty and the degree of experience and skill required, Bishop Arkfeld was the main pilot (with Father Ivo Ruiter SVD in reserve) on these regular excursions for personnel and supplies. This was particularly so in the earlier days before sea travel became more common. When the strong winds of the *taleo*⁷ or the *rai*⁸ seasons played havoc with the boats – ranging from small motorised banana boats to the large passenger and supply boat, the Tau K – there were challenges for captain and passengers alike. Mr Frank Kilgannon, an Australian lay missionary, was captain of the aluminium boat, which was later christened the 'St Paul'. In the early seventies he managed this as yet unnamed boat in all weathers, carrying food and cargo from Wewak to St John's. His successor was Graham Lynch, a New Zealand lay missionary. Graham took on the duties of full-time station manager, captain of the boat, the 'St Paul', master of maintaining the hydro-plant, an electrician and general repair man. His expertise in maintaining the self-sufficiency of the mission by managing livestock, such as cows, pigs and chickens, collecting the eggs and catching fish, and his generosity to the sisters, became legendary.⁹

Once on Kairiru, movement on or around the island for pastoral purposes was mainly on foot or by banana boat, and many were the times the sisters took their chances with the weather – Sister Jill Stringer on her MCH patrols, and the sisters in pastoral work. A welcome luxury was a ride (though somewhat bumpy!) from St John's to St Martin's in the old rusty tractor which Brother Terence Kane FMS used to carry firewood and vegetables for the students and to bring supplies between the two places – and which he somehow almost miraculously managed to maintain in working order!

Teaching at the seminary

As St John's was not formally part of the national education system, it was not entitled to government supplies. Consequently, there was a shortage of curriculum materials. Finding suitable teaching resources for the students was a constant concern, particularly for the upper secondary classes. Sister Helen McDonell recalled being rescued, having received sample copies from her sister, Josette, who was at that time teaching in the National High School at Keravat, near Rabaul. Many long hours were spent reproducing the lesson materials on an ancient gestetner! In 1980, Sister Vianney Dirrman, a librarian from the Melanesian Institute at Goroka, improved the learning situation considerably by setting up a modern library.



Sister Helen McDonell teaching seminarians at Kairiru.

Sisters of Mercy maintained their ministry at the seminary for nearly 20 years, from 1970 to 1989. They played a prominent part in educating many of the 700 seminarians who graduated from St John's during its existence (1952-1995). Long-serving Divine Word Missionary priest lecturers and rectors, like Father (later Bishop) Raymond Kalisz, Ray Cashmere, Don Grant and Clem Gawlik, and other staff members, like John Dwyer, Freddy Kell, Bernie Fisher and Dick Wolff and parish priest, Geoff Brumm, were supportive and appreciative of the sisters in their ministry. They noted in particular, their feminine influence on their young charges. For some time, Sister Jeannine Kalisz, sister of Bishop Raymond Kalisz, worked with the sisters. There were many lay missionaries who served on the staff. Alphonse Aime, later to become editor at the Melanesian Institute and lecturer at Divine Word University, was a former teacher there. Father Mihalik, author of the first Melanesian *Tok Pisin* Dictionary and a prolific writer

on PNG topics, spent some years of retirement on Kairiru, occupied tirelessly with writing and translation work.

In 1974, the first graduate, Father Cherubim Dambui, later to become Auxiliary Bishop of Port Moresby, was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Wewak. Since then 13 others have followed, including Bishop Michael Marai, originally of Mushu Island.

The priests at the seminary appreciated the contribution the sisters made, not only on Kairiru, but elsewhere in the diocese. The rector, Father Kalisz, often gave up his holidays to see that everything was just right for the influx of Wewak (and occasionally the Goroka) sisters for their annual retreat and holidays by the sea. This meant attending to a host of chores, like preparing the dormitory, and rebuilding the dam for the hydro-electric system when it was blocked by flood waters. Marist Brothers, like Brothers Canute Sheehan, Terence Kane and Patrick Howley were helpful in managing the boats and leading the sisters across the island or taking them to nearby islands (Mushu, Yuo and Unai) for picnics.

At the priests' house, the whole community enjoyed evening meals cooked by the loyal Petrus. This was a chance to share friendship and learn from one another about coping with the day-to-day challenges of ministry and island mission living.

Changing pastoral scene



Sister Misericordia on pastoral visit.

The sisters soon embraced a pastoral vision for the whole parish. The prime mover of this enterprise was Sister Misericordia Carter, who went to Kairiru as an experienced Standard Six teacher, and as Head Teacher of St Martin's Primary School. The account from entries in the Sisters' Kairiru chronicle give some idea of the heartaches many of the Standard Six teachers faced when the system prevented the majority of their students from proceeding from primary to secondary education.

As the time for selecting pupils for high school comes round the air seems electric. It is a cause of concern that people have come to see the sisters, especially a Standard Six primary sister, as someone who can get them material gain by getting a child a place in high school, or worse-still, as someone who can prevent their having this much coveted education. To make both adults and children understand that a missionary has something far more important to give, Sister Mary Misericordia feels the urge to disassociate herself from all this,

and be more concerned with giving Christ's message.

Sister Mary Misericordia travels each day about five miles down the island to her school, where thirty-five Standard Six stop-outs are doing a course in Maths, English, and General Studies, through the Department of External Studies. This is a three-year correspondence course which brings the pupils up to a Grade Eight Standard of Education. However, the most valuable part of this three-year course is the Religious Training the pupils will receive and the vocational training which will combat the idleness which is so much part of traditional village life. The Marist Brothers take the boys for woodwork two afternoons per week, whilst the girls do their dressmaking and cooking. Agriculture and animal projects are also part of the curriculum.¹⁰

After much heartbreak and consultation, Sister Misericordia decided to close her school. She spent some time engaged in pastoral work on the island prior to taking leave in Australia for the rest of the year. Upon her return, she embarked on full-time pastoral ministry, a ministry she was to continue and take a leadership role within the diocese for several years.

Other sisters followed Sister Misericordia in pastoral ministry, which involved overnight stays in villages, and strenuous and often anxious boat journeys round the island and to neighbouring islands. Sister Joan MacGinley spent four years in pastoral work in the parish. For a few years when there was no parish priest, Sister RoseMary Baker, who was responsible for the pastoral work ministry there, was requested to induct the PNG married deacon, Reverend Benny Samiat in pastoral duties. Sister Theresia Nakankwien was the last pastoral worker on the island.

The sisters' chronicle records worrying times when sisters crossed the Bismarck Sea for health care, pastoral work or in-service with teachers. On a return journey from giving in-service sessions to the teachers on Mushu Island, Sister Loyola Boyle had a terrifying experience. The double outrigger¹¹ canoe she was in was being paddled in calm seas by seminarians from inland Yangoru and Ulupu. Unfortunately they were unaccustomed to boat travel and when the boat got a bit unbalanced, one of the lads, in his attempt to balance it, made the mistake of standing on the outrigger instead of walking down the middle. The boat capsized without warning and Loyola, unable to swim, was weighed down with her long pleated habit and veil and dragged down into the depths. In her desperate struggle, she lost her veil and glasses, but was at last pulled to safety by the seminarians. Once assured of her life, she became aware of another danger as the young students led her towards the shore. They were right in front of the parish house where possible spectators might view her in her rather undignified state! With her composure later restored, and Loyola once again her cheerful self, the community offered a Mass of Thanksgiving for the lives saved that day! So terrifying was the experience that Sister Loyola was never able to summon the courage to travel in small boats again.¹²

Young PNG sisters

Kairiru was also a place where the young PNG sisters engaged, under supervision, in their external studies. Sister Sophie Samiak from Chambri Lakes, who began her high school studies with Sister Helen McDonnell in Mount Hagen, continued them at Kairiru. Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy, while teaching at St Xavier's in 1992, supervised the external studies of Sister Helen Kiponge from the highlands of Enga. Sister Nell Callaghan coached Theresa Boyek and Veronica Lokalyo in their studies.

The chronicle records the arrival of Theresia Gongi who had previously carried out domestic duties with Sister Val Cervetto at Kaindi, and was now coming to live with the community on Kairiru to prepare for postulancy. Terry was a 23 year old from the Kunjingini area and was by no means accustomed to the sea.

The hour and a half journey on the motor-driven barge, the Tau-K seemed an interminable journey to Theresia as the waves, whipped up from angry seas, drenched the occupants, dense heavy rains adding further discomfort. A memorable journey! A real initiation ceremony! In response to registered astonishment by the community that she came despite the harsh conditions, Theresia's reply was: "Mi fred, tasol mi kam."¹³ Theresia now accompanies Sister Misericordia on pastoral work to the villages.¹⁴

Kairiru was also a refuge for Sister Ursula Gilbert and the novices, Angeline Singiat and Helen Pili, who were forced to flee there for safety after their evacuation from Kaindi because of the land dispute in 1987. The novitiate community arrived on December 1 with Father Stan SVD on the Black Madonna¹⁵, and stayed for several weeks until it was safe to return to Wewak.¹⁶



Sister Fran Hanrahan leaving Kairiru.



Sister RoseMary setting out on pastoral ministry.

Mercy links with Rosary Sisters

In 1972, just two years after the foundation of the Mercy Sisters on Kairiru, Sister Maureen Grant was requested to be Novice Mistress to the Rosary Sisters at Stella Maris Novitiate, on Mushu Island. The sisters' Kairiru chronicle entry records that instead of attending the traditional Easter Monday get-together at Yangoru, the sisters enjoyed the company of the community of the Rosary Sisters from Mushu.¹⁷

Sister Madeleine Gumaure, former Leader of the Rosary Sisters, recalled that when the Rosary Sisters were considering who would guide them in their novitiate, they looked to the Mercy Sisters, as "these kind of people had time not only for study but for the spiritual side of things – their thing was to balance them."¹⁸ With the blessing of Bishop Arkfeld and Mother Marcella, the Brisbane Leader, the Rosary Sisters approached Maureen Grant to be their formator on Mushu for 1974. At the further request of the Rosary Sisters, Maureen later made arrangements with Father Heinemans SVD for their renewal year and their "independence" too, for at the end of that year, elections were held and Sister Josepha, Madeleine's blood sister, was elected Mother General. Some time later, Sister Denise Coghlan came back from Australia and helped them to write their own Constitutions. Madeleine summed up the relationship:

All the Mercy Sisters supported us. They prayed for us and supported us in courses. They always had time for us. They contributed the time, their love and support for us to stand and live – to know our own vocation.¹⁹

Kairiru became a peaceful and restful haven for many sisters and a place of prayer and retreat. Some years later, when the Mercy and Rosary novices were basically sharing a

common formation program in Wewak, Sisters Ann O'Regan and Theresia Allen arranged for them to have a directed retreat on Kairiru, led by Sister Bernadette Lik FMI. The Mercy novices were Theresa Boyek, Claudia Apalenda, Helen Kiponge and Elizabeth Pepom. The Rosary novices were Sophie Pilange and Lucy Pulu.

A story from the village

Theresa Boyek, one of the sisters from the island, recalls a story she heard from her people when she was a junior high school leaver at home in her village on the far side of Kairiru. The whole parish had organised a pilgrimage to carry and place a statue of Mother Mary on the mountain top. This was in 1987 when the sisters who had fled from Kaindi, because of the land dispute, happened to be there. Among the sisters was Moira Cleary, the Deputy Principal at Kaindi, but because of serious illness, she was unable to join in a pilgrimage. However, her simple words and actions of faith on this occasion were long talked about in the village.

The large crowd of people were making their way up the mountain slopes and the Sisters of Mercy were among them when they gathered at the top. Far below Sister Moira met up with some of the women walking some distance behind the others. She told them she probably wouldn't make it to the top, but wished to offer up whatever efforts she could to be united with the people in their faith: she felt her inability could be used by God to gain graces for peace at Kaindi.²⁰

In fact, when the sisters returned to Kaindi campus some weeks later, peace was restored, at least for the time being, and regular education classes resumed. Reconciliation was eventually arranged by the Church, College and Provincial Government authorities and a settlement made.

A time to leave Kairiru

During the 1990s, the islanders experienced severe hardships because of the declining economy and some breakdown of social cohesion, leading to lawlessness. Personal safety was at risk and some sisters were attacked carrying out their ministry. Under these circumstances, and with the number of sisters decreasing, some foundations in the Highlands and Coast were forced to close. Among those to close in the Wewak area were Kairiru and Dreikir. The last Mercy community members on Kairiru in 1993 were Theresia Nakankwien and Elizabeth Pepom. It was with very heavy hearts that they made the final crossing back to Wewak. The convent building remained, a reminder that the sisters might once again minister among the island people of Kairiru and Mushu.

A blessing prayer composed by Sister Angeline Singiat²¹ offers a fitting farewell to the island of Kairiru:

May the earth of your ancestors sustain you. Amen.

May the earth of your childhood and your youth be cherished. Amen.

May the earth of your dreams and visions be probed deeply with delight. Amen.

May the sacred earth within you be nurtured, nourished, befriended and revered for all times. Amen.

Endnotes

- ¹ The first rector was Fr. Clarence Howard SVD, an African American from USA.
- ² Father William Liebert SVD took over responsibility for the Sacred Heart Brothers in 1958, beginning a life-long commitment to them.
- ³ From the Napakoi Journal, "Commemorating the 40 years anniversary of St John's Seminary", November, 92, Vol. 5 No. 4, First Revision.
- ⁴ Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane and the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kairiru.
- ⁵ Messages of communication.
- ⁶ Information provided by Mercy Sisters from Kairiru, Sister Angeline Singiat and Sister Theresa Boyek.
- ⁷ The westerly monsoon winds (approx. October to Easter). Information offered by Graham Lynch on Kairiru.
- ⁸ The south-easterly winds (approx. Easter to October). Information offered by Graham Lynch on Kairiru.
- ⁹ Mihalik, F., SVD. *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*. Madang, DWU Press, 1998, p. 82.
- ¹⁰ Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kairiru.
- ¹¹ Canoe with a light wooden structure added for balance.
- ¹² This was confirmed by Sister Loyola in a personal communication, June, 2007. She noted that the incident occurred on the Feast of St. Therese.
- ¹³ Translated as "I'm afraid, but I will keep going".
- ¹⁴ The date for the sisters' chronicle entry was March 16, 1979.
- ¹⁵ The mission transport and supply vessel.
- ¹⁶ Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kairiru.
- ¹⁷ The dates in the sisters' chronicle were given as April 2 - 4, 1972.
- ¹⁸ Sister Madeleine offered this information in an interview in May 2006.
- ¹⁹ *ibid*.
- ²⁰ Recorded interview with Sister Theresa Boyek, May, 2005.
- ²¹ Published in the Supplement to the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. p. 42. The original version referring to 'you' has been changed to 'us' in the printed edition.



KAIRIRU (1970-1993)

Founding Community

Misericordia Carter (Superior), Maureen (Augustine) Grant, M. Loyola Boyle
and Jill (Raymond) Stringer.

RoseMary Baker

Theresa Boyek

Misericordia Carter

Miriam Devine

Helen McDonell

Maureen (Augustine) Grant

Frances Hanrahan

Veronica Lokalyo

Elizabeth Pepom

Sophie Samiak

Jill (Raymond) Stringer

Mary Loyola Boyle

Nell Callaghan

Madeleine O'Dea

Romley (Vianney) Dirrman

Joan MacGinley

Maureen Flinn

Helen Kiponge

Theresia Nakankwien

Monica Raper

Maura O'Shaughnessy

Ministries

Seminary Teaching, Primary Teaching, High School Teaching, Health Care and MCH Patrols,
CODE Teaching, School Leavers' School (Skulanka), Pastoral Work,
Visitation, Hospitality.





GOROKA

Early Scenes (1956 - 1963)

1. Sister Marie Dagg - St Mary's Church, 1956.
2. Sister Julian Clarke and pupils, Katagu c.1962.
3. Sisters and pupils at Yamiufa School c.1962.
4. Bishop Schilling and Sister Irenaeus - Tafeto School c.1962.
5. Sister St Roch, nurse and willing teacher, Faniufa c.1960.

6. Sister Mary Gleeson, Audrey and Marjory Stainsby and assistant teachers c.1958.
7. Sister Julian returning home from school.



SIMBU

1960s Scenes

1. Mother Patrick and Sister St Roch cross the Wahgi Bridge to Kup, 1963.
2. Sister Rita Hassett in the Kup kitchen.
3. Sister Valda accepts help – Goglme c.1968.
4. Convent and Church at Kup, 1966.

5. Koge Mission station with Mount Wilhelm beneath the clouds, 1969.
6. Sister Margaret Wilson – nurse at Goglme – waits patiently, 1969.
7. Sister Coral Hedley and class at St Michael's School, Koge, 1969.
8. Father Jim Knight SVD at Koge, late 1960s.



SIMBU

1. Sisters Margaret Bubb, Margaret Clarke, Valda Finlay and Margaret Wilson with Father Henk te Maarssen SVD – Goglime Mission Station.
2. Sister Margaret Bubb and Mr Frank Yur – Rural Vocational Centre, Koge.
3. Sister Maria Goretti McCosker accepts help across the Simbu River.

4. Simbu Mission nurses—Sisters Margaret Wilson, Wilhelmina SSsS (back), and Clement Mary Anderton (front).
5. Sister Marie Goretti's patients outside Koge 'haus sik'.
6. Simbu sisters halted by a landslide on the Daulo Pass, 1974.
7. Koge transport over the edge at Muaina bridge.
8. Sister Margaret Wilson makes a call to the sick on foot in the Goglime parish.



SIMBU

1970s onwards

1. Sisters Clare Flinn, Solange Arua OLSH and M. Eamon Brennan at Kondiu (1980s).
2. Koge students, Simbu sports champions (c. 1969).
3. Sister Deirdre Murphy at Kondiu Welcome sign, 1981.
4. Sister Joan Adams and patient – Neragaima, 1980.

5. Sisters Maryanne Kolkia and Margaret Roni – Neragaima, 1999.
6. Neragaima road on a fine day.
7. Bishop William Kurts SVD (later Archbishop of Madang) and Henk te Maarssen SVD, (later Bishop of Kundiawa, Simbu), at Rosary High School Chapel, Kondiu (1980s).



SIMBU

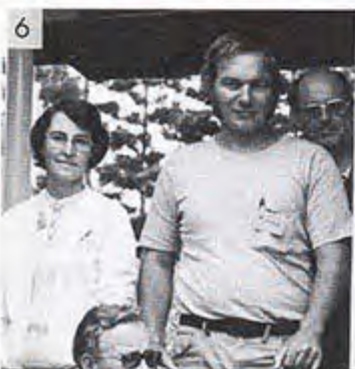
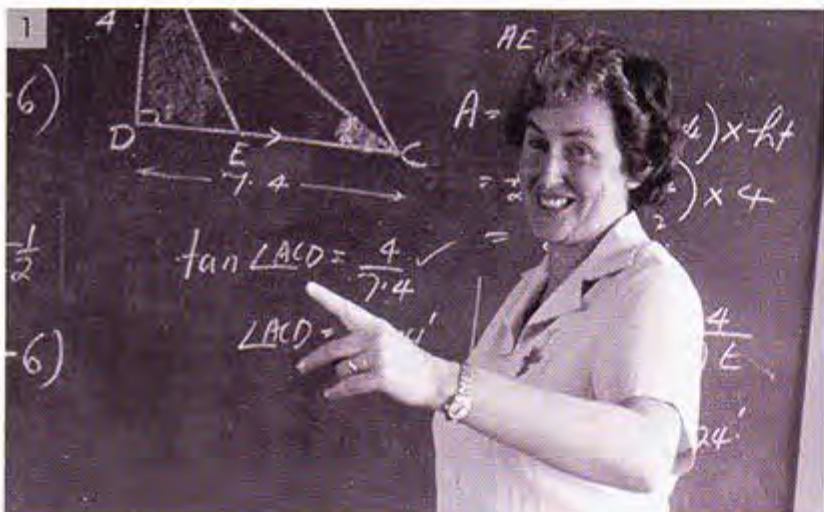
1. Bishop John Cohill SVD (second Bishop of Goroka) and Father John Nilles SVD pioneer of Catholic Church in Simbu.
2. Bishop Raymond Caesar SVD (third Bishop of Goroka) and Vicar General, Father Ernest Ferlij SVD.
3. Father Dowd SVD, Sisters Teresa Flaherty, Clement Mary Anderton, Mary Damian Ika, Anne Flaherty and Karkar parishioners, 1970.
4. Anne Flaherty (Teresa's sister).
5. Lay missionary, Tricia Bubb, (Margaret's sister) and friend - Koge.
6. Jan Birmingham, Lay Missionary and former Mercy student, Koge.
7. Angela Nilkare - Head Kuk-meri and friend, Koge (1970s).
8. Highlands School Inspectors - Teresa Flaherty, Marisa Connors (SND) and Helen McDonell, 1972.



COMMUNITY CROSSINGS

Goroka, Simbu, and the Highlands – Growing Signs of Unity (1967 – 1981)

1. Goroka Sisters at Faniufa – 1967 – Marie Dagg (Singleton), M. Patrick Mahoney (Goulburn), Valda Finlay (Bathurst), Coral Hedley (Gunnedah), Rita Hassett (Singleton).
2. Kup and Goglme Sisters – Clement Mary Anderton (Singleton), Margaret Wilson (Melbourne), Elizabeth Miller (Adelaide), Noreen Collins (Perth), Patrick Mahoney (Goulburn), RoseMary Baker (Melbourne) and Father Mailander – Early 1970s.
3. Union Leader, Sister Maria Joseph (No 7) with Simbu and three coastal Sisters – Terry Quinlivan (No 3), Judith Hourigan (No 8) and Wendy Flannery (No 10) – mid 1970s.
4. Highlands group (Simbu, Goroka, Enga and Mount Hagen) at Mingende, with Sister Valda Ward (Conference) and Sister Patricia Kerin (North Sydney) – late 1970s.
5. Combined Highlands group at Kondiu. Back Row: Agnes Murphy, Rita Hassett, Marie Dagg, Helen McDonnell, Julie Rees, Teresa Flaherty, Clare Flinn, Helen O'Brien, Valda Finlay, M. Eamon Brennan. Front Row: Margaret Bubb, RoseMary Baker, Margaret Shakeshaft, Wendy Flannery, Mavis McBride, Joan Adams c. 1982.



BACK TO GOROKA

Scenes from late 1970s

1. Sister Bernadette Marks, Aiyura, 1978.
2. Sister Julie Rees and students – Aiyura, 1983.
3. Brother Damian Lunders SVD, Manager Kefamo.
4. Melanesian Institute Library, Goroka.
5. Sister Anne Frances offering hospitality, Goroka, 1996.

6. Melanesian Institute. (Top Left) Sisters Judith Hourigan, (Centre) Helen O'Brien, (Right) Wendy Flannery, late 1970s. Divine Word Missionaries in the photo who worked with Sisters of Mercy are: Fathers Cornelius van der Geest, Ennio Mantovani, Henk te Maarssen, Bill Seifert, Gerry Bus, Leo van der Helm, Pat Gesch and Peter van Adrichem.



BACK TO GOROKA

1. Bishop of Goroka - Rev. Francesco Sarego SVD.
2. Fathers Harry Gahare (Tafeto) and Matthew Landu (Goroka) - Priests of Goroka Diocese and former students of Tafeto and Faniufa.
3. Retired Bishop of Goroka - Rev. Michael Marai.
4. Ulla Waugla (former Kondi student) and Father Louis Ambane (second priest of Simbu) - University of Goroka.
5. Meg Taylor - renowned lawyer, and former pupil of St. Marys, Goroka.
6. Sister Vicky Sant, Father Alois Blas SVD and Sister Ignatiele SSsP - House of Prayer, Goroka.
7. Sister Teresa Flaherty on one of the six visits to Bougainville from 1996 to 2001.
8. Sister Teresa Flaherty's CODE Report - UN Consultancy to Bougainville, 2001.
9. Pupils of the Tok Ples Skul - Tonu, Bougainville, 1995.



COOLOCK HOUSE

Scenes from 2003

1. Back veranda of Coolock House of Formation, Goroka.
2. Sisters Emma Awehi, Theresia Tina and Margaret Roni prepare a meal.
3. Panorama from the back yard.
4. Sisters Helen White, Sophie Samiak, Carmel Martin, Theresa Boyek and Mariska Kua – Carmel's farewell, 2004.
5. Peter Umba – Catechist and loyal caretaker (and former Kondiu student).
6. Sisters Helen White and Theresa Boyek near the haus win.
7. Sister Cathy Jambet and faithful dog, Daigiro
8. Hilda Yangele arrives from Wewak for Novitiate.
9. Father John Ryan – on a pastoral visit.



PUMAKOS, ENGA

Scenes from 1965

1. Pumakos Convent – 1965.
2. Bishop George Bernarding SVD with Sisters Margaret Shakeshaft, Helen McDonell, Francis Harcombe and Clare Gilchrist, Pumakos.
3. Father Tony Krol SVD buying and organising market vegetables for plane transport to Wewak.

4. Sunday Mass – Pumakos.
5. Catechists at Pumakos with Father Joe Krettek SVD.
6. Baptisms at Pumakos.
7. Sister Margaret Shakeshaft shares a meal on a pastoral visit – Enga.



MOUNT HAGEN

Scenes from Holy Trinity Teachers College

1. A gathering of the Sisters of Mercy from North Sydney at Holy Trinity. Back Row. Mother Francis Harcombe, Sisters Jennifer Bailey, Margaret Shakeshaft, Josephine Byrnes, Helen McDonell, Clare Gilchrist and Kathleen Robertson.
2. Holy Trinity Teachers College staff in the early 1980s
Front Row: Patrick McInerney De la Salle, Valda Finlay RSM Christian Moe De la Salle, Sisters Gaudi Linden and Raphaela SSps.
Middle Row: John Wald SVD, Margaret Shakeshaft RSM, Cecilia Holohan OSF, Agnes Murphy RSM (extreme right).
Back Row: Ambrose Gwynne De la Salle, Ed Becker De la Salle (Principal), Marilyn Chall OSF, Zita Pushoi OLSH, and de Porres SND. Lay Missionary, Estela Lising, Deputy Principal is No 5 in middle row. Other members of Staff are from PNG.

3. Archbishop Michael Meier SVD – retired Archbishop of Mount Hagen.
4. Young women graduates of Holy Trinity Teachers College, 1992.
5. Founding Sisters at Wanepap – Jenny Bailey and Clare Gilchrist, 1991.
6. Sisters in front of the first Convent of Mercy at Holy Trinity in the 1980s with PNG Sisters of Mercy, 1987. *Back Row:* Valda Finlay, Veronica Lokalyo, Anne Frances Carroll, Jenny Bailey, Anne Hook, Margaret Shakeshaft, Eamon Brennan, Rita Hassett. *Middle Row:* Joan Adams, Mary Stallard, Petronia Gawi, Nance Munro, Carmel Carroll, Maureen O'Donnell, Angeline Singiat. *Front Row:* Mariska Kua and Teresa Flaherty.
7. Sisters Ellen Dunn and Josette McDonell – early role models for women students at Holy Trinity Teachers College with dormitories named in their honour.

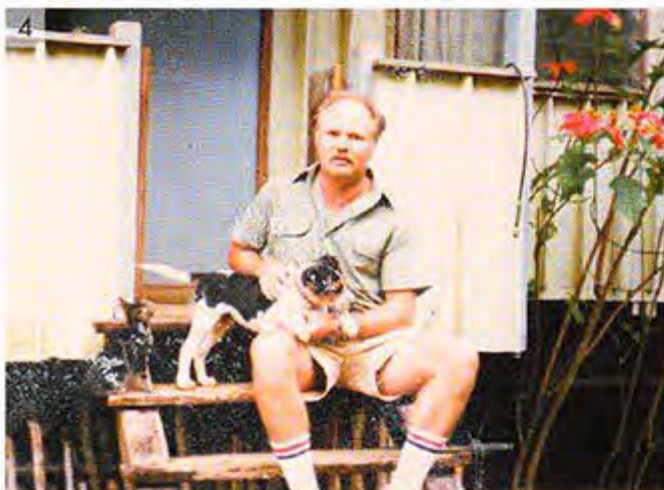


JUBILEES ENGA

Scenes of Diocese of Wabag

1. Bishop of Wabag, Rev. Herman Raich SVD con-celebrates the Eucharist with Fathers Tony Krol SVD and Joe Krettek SVD in the former Pumakos Church.
2. Golden Jubilee Eucharistic Celebration of the Catholic Mission at Pumakos (2001) – the congregation form the 'church walls'.
3. At the Pumakos Celebrations – Father Tony Krol SVD, Helen McDonnell, Clare Gilchrist, Margaret Shakeshaft and Jennifer Bailey, 2001.

4. Concelebrant at the Pumakos Celebrations – Co-adjutor Bishop of Wabag, Rev. Arnold Orowae.
5. Celebrating 100 years of the Divine Word Missionaries in PNG (1996) and preparing for Fifty Years of the Catholic Church in Enga (1997) – Carrying the Bokis Kontrak across a rope bridge in Enga, 1996.
6. Engans celebrate Mercy Golden Jubilee in Goroka (2006) – Margaret Shakeshaft, Father Joe Krettek SVD, Helen Law, Sue Smith, Jenny Bailey, Bernadette Serao SND and Veronica Lokalyo.



McAULEY HOUSE

Administration Centre from 1989

1. Sister Pat O'Shea offers hospitality.
2. Sister Vero Lokalyo tending the vegetable garden.
3. The haus-win – the sisters' outside social spot.
4. Brother Kevin Diederich SVD – long-time building adviser and friend to the sisters in the Highlands.
5. Building Constructor, Matthew Sisi, supervises the extensions for the Administration Centre.
6. Back Row: Sisters Agnes Murphy, Sister Ghislaine from Kondiu, Gabrielle Flood, Mary Stallard, Sue Smith. Front Row: Joan McGinley, Helen Law, Helen White and Pat O'Shea.



KUNJINGINI and TOREMBI

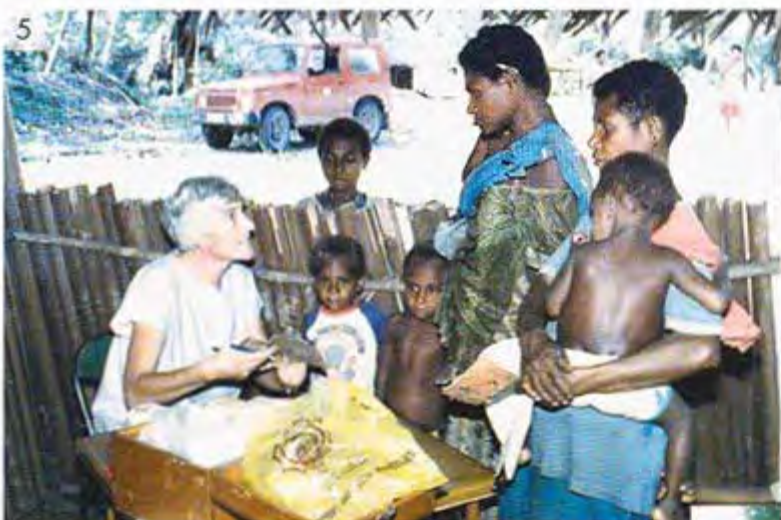
Early Scenes from 1958

1. Sister Mary Scanlon and a Rosary Sister companion help one another get to the other side.
2. Sisters Bridie Fennessy and Margarita Shannon, on pastoral and health visits, are ferried across the Amaku River in flood.
3. Sisters Marietta Riedy and Mother Francis Regis try out the new motor-cycles for future mission use 1956.
4. Sisters Eileen Brosnan and Irene Callanan cross a river in the usual Torembi way!
5. Sister Val Cervetto finds another way to cross a river.
6. Mother Damian enlists the support of Mother Oliver O'Halloran of Cairns for a sister – Elva Russell – for Torembi for 1958.
7. Sister Val Cervetto uses her handy butchering skills at Kunjingini.



KUNJINGINI and TOREMBI

1. Kunjiningi Teachers College – later the diocesan Bible College.
2. School girls on monkey bars – Kunjiningi.
3. High school girl boarders in Dining Room – Torembi, 1963.
4. The sisters' dream - Mother teaching child (Negrie photo).
5. Catechist, Joseph Petau, at prayer – Kunjiningi.
6. Sister Shirley Myers wonders at a mother with bilum and firewood load.
7. Pupil performs an Irish jig – Kunjiningi.
8. Sister Marietta's First Communicants.



WEWAK

Mercy Health Care

1. Sisters Joan Hooper and Jacinta Wiedman (nurse) at Torembi.
2. Sister Isabel's clinic – Kunjingini.
3. Sister Mary Wildie and Lay Missionary on village health visit, Torembi.
4. Sister Marlene Fitzgibbons and Hospital Orderly at Yangoru.

5 & 6. Sister Anne McDonnell on an MCH patrol in Kunjingini parish.



WEWAK

Wewak and Coastal Ministries

1. Mama Christina – Landowner and patron of young Sepik women's education – Yarapos.
2. Mercy College Yarapos school buildings.
3. Planning for the future: former Headmistresses of Yarapos, Sister Abina Looney and Maureen Grant.

4. Science lesson with Sister Denise Cogan (former Headmistress) at Yarapos.
5. Sister Wendy Flannery and Sister Marilyn Soeder - Daru.
6. Sister Cynthia Griffin dramatises the 'Woman at the Well' – Conference of Women Religious' meeting, Yarapos.
7. Builder Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD celebrates his Jubilee at Yarapos (1991).



WEWAK

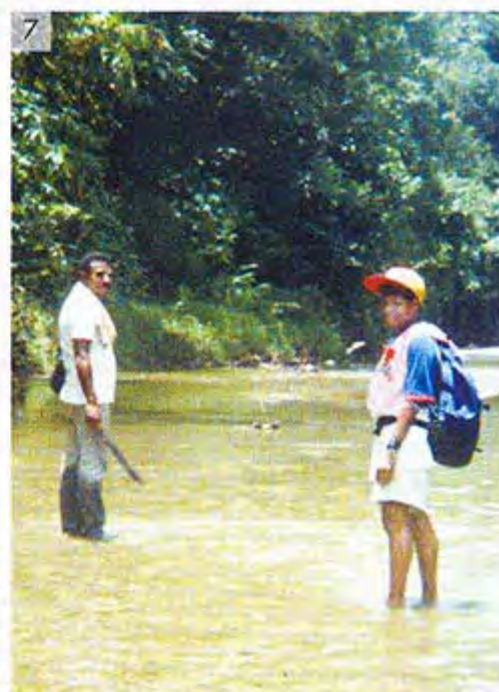
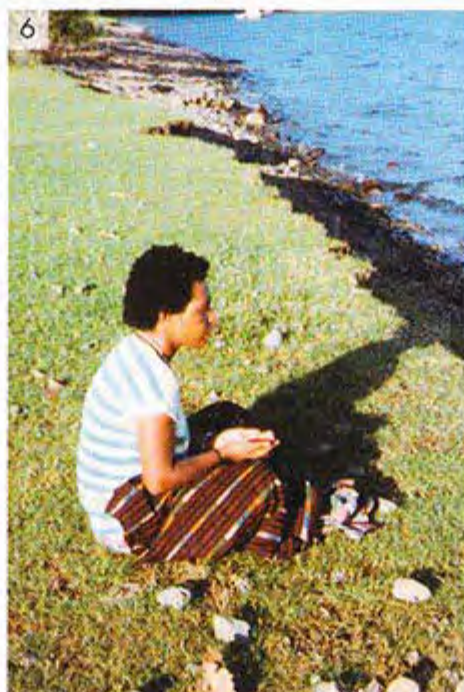
1. Graduation – Mercy College, Yarapos students.
2. Sister Maureen Grant – Headmistress, Yarapos.
3. Sister Anne Hannigan teaches Agriculture – and self-reliance.
4. Yarapos Sisters – Back Row: Maureen Grant (Brisbane), Margaret Bray (Grafton), Fran Readman (Ballarat). Front Row: Margaret Boyle and Bev Whitten (Grafton).
5. Student builders at Yarapos.
6. Sister Ann O'Regan and girls – Yarapos.



WEWAK

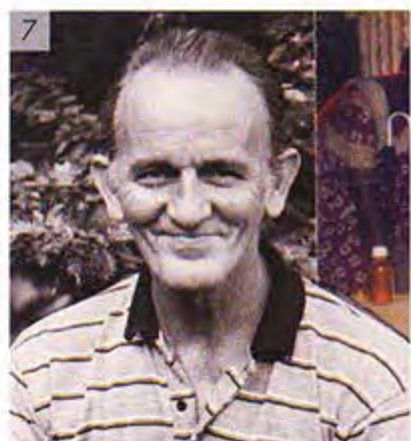
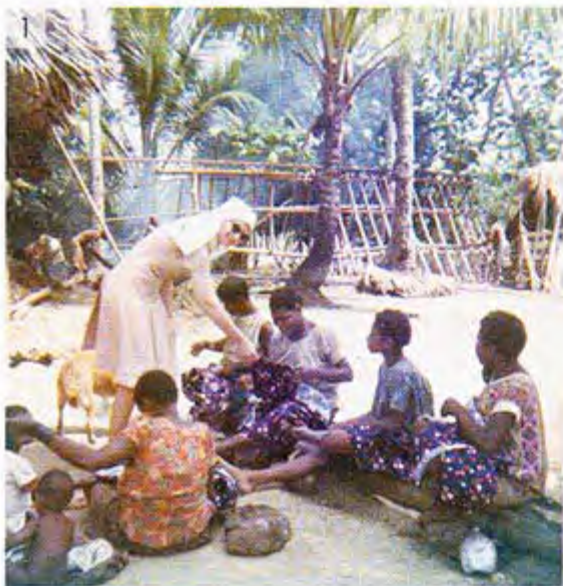
1. Yarapos Staff, late 1970s. Father Kees Meier SVD, Lay missionaries and national staff, *Back Row*: Sister Ann O'Regan, *Middle Row*: Mother Francis Regis, Sisters Irene Callanan and Judith Hourigan, *Front Row*: Sisters Maureen O'Shaughnessy and Abina Looney.
2. Mercy College Yarapos students march in Wewak.
3. Wewak Sisters of Mercy from Queensland, Kaindi convent, c. 1975. Mother Francis Regis and Marcella McCormick (Brisbane Leader) are third and fourth respectively from left

- in the front row.
4. Father Yoep Heinemans SVD with sisters and friends.
5. Sister Pauline Masters (Perth) and unidentified Sister mechanic (Jacinta?) find a 6 inch nail in the tyre at Dreikir.
6. Sister Maureen Grant receives a PNG Government award and medal while Sister Marie Geddes looks on.
7. Sister Angeline Singiat, former Headmistress, addresses the gathering at the Mercy PNG Jubilee, 2007.



WEWAK and AITAPE CROSSINGS

1. Sister Irene Masterson – Reader in the Liturgy at Kaindi Chapel.
2. Sister Theresia Nakankwien – Reader – follows in Irene's footsteps.
3. Sister Catherine Courtney visits the Brisbane sisters on Kairiru, late 1970s.
4. Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer on the move at the Kaindi convent.
5. Sister Loyola Boyle relies on childhood dairy skills from Ireland.
6. Sister Elizabeth Pepom prays by the sea on Kairiru.
7. Sister Sophie Samiak carrying out an MCH patrol in Drekikir.
8. Gathering on Kairiru – *Back Row:* RoseMary Baker, Monica Raper, Helen McDonnell. *Front Row:* Moira Cleary, Carmel Carroll and Ellen Dunn.
9. Sisters Philomena Waira and Thuy at Kaindi.



WEWAK and AITAPE CROSSINGS

1. Sister Marie Therese Langan (Townsville Leader) joins with the Negrie sisters in pastoral work with women in the parish.
2. Sister Helen O'Brien and Bishop William Rowell OFM – Diocesan Planning Meeting, Aitape.
3. Sisters Theresia Nakankwien, Clare Gilchrist, Julie Anne Ryan, Marie Britza and Theresia Gongi, Raihu Hospital, Aitape
4. Sisters Helen McDonnell and RoseMary Baker cross from the Highlands to Kairiru.
5. Sister Ann O'Regan on a village pastoral visit – Dreikirir.
6. At Aitape – Sister Judy Treacy, Catherine Hefferan and Julie Anne Ryan.
7. Brother Matthew Bouten, SVD former Catholic Health Secretary, Wewak Diocese.



WEWAK and KIUNGA CROSSINGS

From Mission Station Communities to other Partnerships

1. Bishop Leo Arkfeld SVD visits the Mercy and Rosary Sisters at Kunjingini - late 1950s.
2. The Kairiru community - Jeannine Kalisz, Nell Callaghan, Abina Looney and Joan MacGinley.
3. The Yangoru Sisters (Rockhampton) Stancia Cawte, Marlene Fitzgibbons, Desma Clarke and Margaret Houlahan (Ballarat) with Father Bill Kelly SVD and Brother Bernard Noster, 1974.

4. Sister Carmel King on outstation ministry, Negrie, 1975.
5. Sepik phone link with the rest of the world - Sisters Maureen Grant (Angoram High School), Maria Jean Rhule, RoseMary Baker (on pastoral ministry) and Father Joe Pirzkall SVD, late 1980s.
6. Sister Catherine Corbett works with refugees in the diocese of Daru-Kiunga, 2007.
7. The Negrie community (Townsville) - Cheryl Camp, Christine Bisley, Townsville Leader, Marie Therese Langan, Josephine Martyn and Desma Clarke (Rockhampton), 1980.



Silver Jubilee of the Sisters of Mercy Kunjini (1982). Back Row: Miriam Devine, Misericordia Carter, Beverly Whitten, Maureen Grant, Francis Regis Everingham, Maria Jean Rhule, Margarita Shannon, Anne McDonnell, Jacinta Wiedman, Mary Stallard, Carmel McCormick, Irene Masterson, Helen White. Front Row: Anne Frances Carroll, Val Cervetto, Terry Gongi, Justina Bedford, Cephas Philben, Maura O'Shaughnessy, Joan O'Toole, Nell Callaghan, Joan McGinley, Bernadette O'Dwyer, Petronia Gawi, Ann O'Regan

WEWAK and PORT MORESBY CROSSINGS

1. Kairuru Community – Misericordia Carter, Veronica Lokalyo, Joan MacGinley, Romley Dirrman, Nell Callaghan, (c.1992).
2. Kunjini Community 2001 – Margaret Roni, Ann O'Regan and Cathy Jambet.
3. Sister Alberta Bussutin (Townsville), Val Cervetto and Carmel McCormick, c. 1977.
4. Sister Bernadette Rodgers, from New Zealand – Kaindi Teachers College, 1986.
5. Sisters Marie Murphy and Hortense CSN and Therese Dokat S S Th at Xavier Institute – mid 1980s.
6. Recent photo of Archbishop Brian Barnes OFM with Sir Paulias Matane (Governor General) and Sir Michael Somare (Prime Minister). Brian was Bishop of Aitape when the Sisters of Mercy were at the Raihu Hospital.
7. Silver Jubilee of Sisters of Mercy – Kunjini, 1982.



PAPUA NEW GUINEAN SISTERS

Steps towards Vowed Mercy Life

1. Novitiate – Petronia Gawi, Theresia Nakankwien, Angela Kaima, Cephas Philben, Mariska Kua, Ursula Gilbert.
2. Catherine House – Novitiate on St Benedict's, Kaindi campus.
3. Sister Petronia Gawi, the first to make Final Vows: 28 Dec 1988 at Awaip.
4. Sister Terry Gongi on her Final Profession day at Kunjingini.

5. Bishop Ray Kalisz SVD, Celebrant at a First Vows ceremony in St Benedict's, Kaindi.
6. Sister Veronica Lokalyo proclaims her Final Vows at Sari.
7. Sister Helen O'Brien, Leader, presenting the Mercy Cross to Sister Sophie Samiak.
8. Sister Carmel Bourke offered renewal in the life and spirituality of Catherine McAuley.



PAPUA NEW GUINEAN SISTERS

1. Sister Mariska Kua, being carried to the Sisters by her family and community at Kup, in the Final Vows ceremony.
2. Sister Angeline Singiat on her Final Profession day on Kairiru.
3. Sister Cathy Jambet (Right) attended by Sister Theresia Tina (Left) on her Final Profession day at Kumdi.
4. Sister Emma Awehi makes her First Vows at St Benedict's Chapel, Kaindi.
5. Sister Schola Fakiwi on the occasion of her Final Profession.
6. Sisters' Renewal of Vows Ceremony at Yarapos, in the presence of Archbishop Leo Arkfeld SVD and Father Liam Dunn SVD.



MERCY LIFE

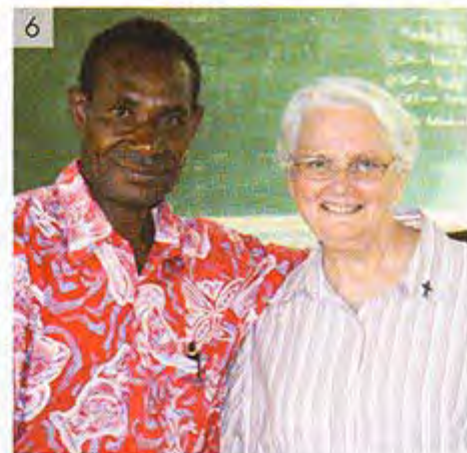
Living the Mercy Way of Life

1. Sister Kaye Bolwell with CODE students of the Mercy Education Program – former novitiate, Kaindi.
2. Sister Veronica Lokalyo – pastoral ministry in Mount Hagen.
3. Sister Catherine Jambet prepares a garden plot – the Western Highlands traditional way.
4. Sister Schola Fakiwi adds some finishing touches to the ceremonial 'bilas' of Sister Claudia Apalenda.
5. Sister Robina Einde (Back) and Catherine Hopil (Front Right) with students at the Vocational Training Centre – Mingende.
6. Sister Emma Awehi with her pre-school pupils at Kaindi.
7. Novices from Adelaide, Sisters Do Thi Thu and Tran Thi Thu Trang experience some of Mercy Life in PNG with Sister Sophie Samiak.



MERCY LIFE

1. Sister Margaret Roni tends a sick woman.
2. PNG Sisters at Kaindi convent – late 1990s. Back Row: Theodora Talili, Claudia Apalenda. Middle Row: Veronica Lokalyo, Margaret Roni, Emma Awehi. Front Row: Schola Fakiwi, Petronia Gawi, Terry Gongi.
3. Sister Sophie Samiak leads the procession for the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Sisters Cynthia Griffin and Teresa Flaherty, Adelaide, 2005.
4. Sister Theresia Nakankwien with participants at the Mercy International Formation Meeting in Peru.
5. An early photo of Sister Terry Gongi studying at Yarapos.
6. At the Novitiate – Sisters Anne O'Regan and Theresa Boyek. Maura O'Shaughnessy waves in the background.



CELEBRATIONS – LANDMARKS

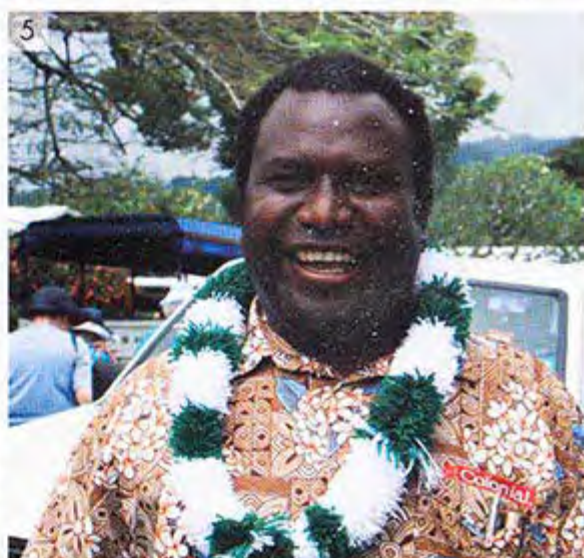
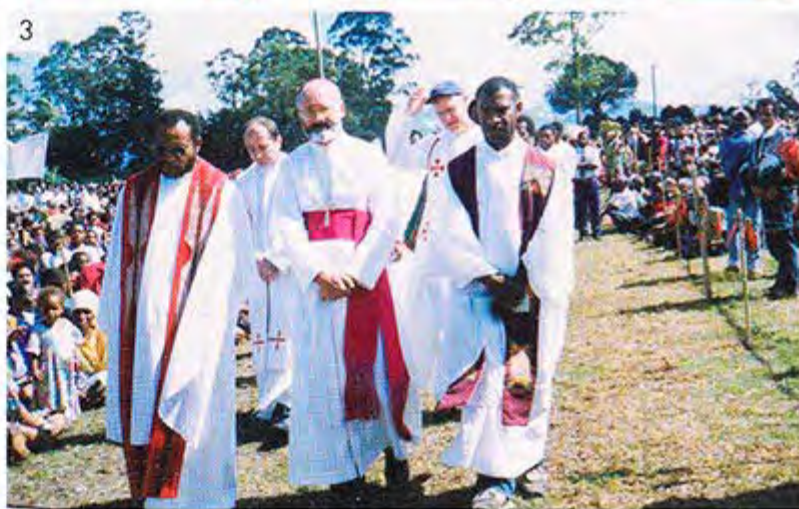
Assemblies, Jubilees, Reunions and Farewells

1. Celebration of Forty Years of the Sisters of Mercy in Goroka – 1996.
2. Consultant Sister Deirdre Jordan and Scripture Lecturer Veronica Lawson admire their cultural gifts at the 1990 Assembly.
3. The Parish Women of Kunjingini celebrate 50 years of the parish in a ceremonial dance.
4. The women's gift is handed to the Guests of Honour, Fathers Otto Separi and Cherubim Dambui (the first priest of the Wewak Diocese and later Bishop – Port Moresby).
5. The clock is then handed to Sister Val Cervetto who presents the precious gift to the Leader, Sister Helen O'Brien, for McAuley House.
6. Sister Stancia Cawte meets Peter, whom she named as a child at Baptism, at the Yangoru Mercy Jubilee Celebrations, 2007.



CELEBRATIONS – LANDMARKS

1. Joseph Langu, former Catechist, with his daughter and granddaughter at the Fifty Years Kunjingini Parish Celebrations.
2. Sisters Margarita and Val Cervetto are farewelled in the traditional way by the Kunjingini people, 1990.
3. Bishop Michael Marai – long-time friend and supporter of the Novitiate community with Sister Margarita and her sister, and PNG Sisters of Mercy.
4. Sister Maria Jean Rhule hands over the keys of the Yangoru convent to Sister Wilhelmina, Leader of the Rosary Sisters, 1982.
5. The PNG Leadership Team of 2003 – 2007, with the Institute Leader, Pat Fox (2), and the Brisbane Leader, Pauline Burke (7). Theresa Boyek (1), Julie Anne Ryan (3), Mariska Kua – Leader (4), Agnes Murphy (5) and Angeline Singiat (6).
6. Sister Mariska Kua with the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, at the Mercy Jubilee Celebrations – Kaindi, 2007.



CELEBRATIONS – CROSSINGS

1. Mercy Assembly Wewak – 1990s – praying and discerning the call of the Spirit. Sisters Kath Burke, Leader of the Institute Team of Australia, is present.
2. Monita Ninkama, Simbu migrant to Goroka, knows that feeding the family is an everyday effort. Monita has attended Mercy Works workshops held by the Sisters in Goroka.
3. Archbishop Doug Young has invited the sisters to carry out the Mercy Works PNG Project in Mount Hagen.
4. Co-directors of the Mercy Works PNG Project in Goroka and Mount Hagen – Maryanne Kolkia and Gaye Lennon.
5. Brother Alfred Tivinarlik welcomes the Sisters of Mercy to St Benedict's – Kaindi to celebrate 50 years of Teacher Education in the East Sepik Province.



CELEBRATIONS – CROSSINGS

Final Glimpses of Mercy Golden Jubilee, 2006 – 2007

1. Farewell to Kairiru 2007, Sisters Petronia Gawi, Joan MacGinley and Theresa Boyek.
2. Rosary Sisters' Leader, Grace Domani, after her address on the contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to health services in the Wewak Diocese, presents Sister Mary Wildie (Torembi and Yangoru, 1958 – 67) with a bouquet of orchids.
3. Sister Ursula Gilbert – first Novice Mistress – bids a heartfelt farewell.

4. Sisters Theresia Nakankwien and Maria Jean Rhule reunite for the special Jubilee occasion in Yangoru.
5. Bishop Tony Burgess rejoices in the 2007 Mercy Jubilee, and makes a plea for government funding for schools and teachers in the neglected rural areas of the East Sepik Province.
6. Sister Irene Callanan renews a special friendship, Wewak, 2007.
7. Sister Loyola Boyle receiving Communion in the Eucharistic Celebration on Kairiru, 2007.



CELEBRATIONS – NEW BEGINNINGS

Trusting in One Another ... and in Your Providence, Loving Lord.

1. Sister Marie Dagg with former students, including Lawrence Akanufa outside St. Mary's Church, Goroka – Jubilee Celebrations, 2006.
2. Sacred Heart School, Faniufa, Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Goroka, 2006.
3. Sister Sandra Lupi and other sisters (Left) Miriam Devine and Joan Hooper, and (Right) Catherine Harris and Fran Readman bid farewell at Mercy Secondary School, Yarapos, 2007.
4. Sisters Stancia Cawte, Margaret Rush, Terry Gongi and Bridie Fennessy, wave goodbye at Yarapos, 2007.

5. Sisters Val Cervetto and Bridie Fennessy lead the Teacher Education March Past – St Benedict's, Kaindi, 2007.
6. Sisters Fran Readman and Miriam Devine share their joy.
7. Sister Colleen Rhodes at Jubilee Celebrations Kairiru, Wewak, 2007.
8. Sister Madeleine Gumaure, former Leader of the Rosary Sisters, caught in a moment of reverie.
9. Sisters Desma Clarke, Irene Masterson, Catherine Hefferan and Petronia Gawi bring the Eucharistic offering to the altar – St Benedict's, Kaindi, 2007. Brother Andrew Simpson CFC, Vice-President of Divine Word University, is in the background. Sister Petronia Gawi is the current Leader of the PNG Region (2008-)

BRISBANE MERCY SISTERS TO DREKIKIR (1979-1992)

In 1979, two Sisters of Mercy were appointed to Dreikir, a remote rural area 64 kilometres from Kunjigini. The roads deteriorated the further one travelled from the town of Wewak, a total distance of 165 kilometres. Dreikir was part of the Maprik Deanery and a centre for several remote mission stations beyond – Aresili (40 kilometres) Tau (20 kilometres), Yassip (16 kilometres) and Bongos (40 kilometres).¹

Temporary dwelling in Tau – then on to Dreikir

The health care at the time, including patrols to the outstations, was carried on by two lay missionary nurses, Adele Cottrell-Dormer and Dorothy Sheehan, who were living in Yassip, a station run by Father Peter O'Reilly SVD, Adele's second cousin. Although the plan was for the sisters and the nurses to live in a central location at Dreikir, the building was not ready in time. As a temporary arrangement, Sisters Ann O'Regan and Nell Callaghan went to live at Tau in a small school office which was renovated after the other school buildings had been relocated. The convent building was not ready until October that year, as the lay missionary builder, Basil Doherty, was also involved in construction of the Kaindi church, the Yarpas teachers' houses and Kunjigini convent renovations. Furthermore, the wet season² had set in, making the remote roads impassable. With the convent completed at last, the nurses joined the sisters at Dreikir.³



Dreikir Jungle.



Sister Ann O'Regan at Dreikir Convent.

Tentative beginnings

The two sisters began pastoral work, feeling their way and conditioning themselves to the needs of the different parts of the parish. Though, in Ann O'Regan's words, their task was

"a bit fuzzy and not clearly defined", they began by carrying out a census throughout the parish, training and working alongside prayer leaders and Church leaders, and seeking ways to improve the lives of the women. Although they had hardly any resources, they equipped themselves with a few hand sewing machines, thread and *laplap*⁴ and resolutely went out to the village women offering lessons in sewing, bread-making in drum ovens and Bible sharing. The newly acquired skills of sewing and bread-making could be carried on in the women's own villages. When any woman was able to sew certain garments and service a machine she 'won' that machine and could begin to use it in the village for her livelihood. As time went on, representatives of the East Sepik Council of Women visited Dreikir and were impressed with what was being done. They valued the sisters' support of the women in these remote areas and donated five sewing machines.



Sister Ann O'Regan: ministry with women.

Pastoral ministry, promoting lay participation in the Church

The sister's work with the women continued, but once at the permanent base of Dreikir, they were able to be more involved with the growth of lay participation in the Church through their work with prayer and Church leaders and other forms of parish development. They were keen to get the people to express their own goals for themselves, but this was not easy at first because they were not used to being asked! However, a level of understanding, trust and influence grew as the sisters carried out their demanding tasks, with much work carried out for hours on foot and with few resources. In accordance with the diocesan vision and working with the priests, they started with ideals from the Movement for a Better World, and later embarked on the "New Image of the Parish" (NIP) pastoral program adopted by the diocese. This was quite a different method of organisation of the parish and began with Christian Community Retreats in every village in every parish. Ann recalls how this happened:

In the years that I was in the Drekikir area, which covered five parishes, a very big part of my pastoral work became working in a team and giving the Christian Community Retreats, as well as training local teams to give retreats. That entailed a lot of walking and mountainous walking at that, particularly in Aresili! In all I counted that I gave 50 Christian Community Retreats and Training Courses and about half of those I gave with Father Waldemar, the priest team member of the Drekikir area.

The emphasis was in the strengthening of small Christian communities. I remember the growth of shared prayer among the people. In the beginning of those days we were asked to get people in those groups to share a prayer. You had to teach them how to make a prayer out of what they had said – and based on the scripture passage somehow. And it was a struggle. Now when I hear what happens today in shared prayer and charismatic groups, and Prayers of the Faithful and people are able to pour forth spontaneously their prayer – old people, men, women, young people – I can see a tremendous growth in the skill of sharing prayer. Before they could not share anything.⁵

The sisters who followed in pastoral work in Drekikir were Misericordia Carter, Ann Hook, and Veronica Lokalyo. Sister Petronia Gawi taught in the primary school.

Health care – Sister Jacinta's strenuous bush patrols



Sister Jacinta in clinic.



Sister Jacinta's baby scale.

When Sister Nell returned to teach at the seminary on Kairiru in 1981, Sister Jacinta Wiedman was appointed to the Drekikir community where she carried out her nursing ministry. Her strenuous round of clinics in the area showed her amazing commitment and endurance. Jacinta visited the villages of five mission stations – Tau, Bongos, Aresili, Dato and Drekikir. She had long distances to cover, and while some places could be reached by car and mission plane, others required long bush walks of up to five hours and overnight stopovers in villages.

The realities of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) work in bush areas were not new to Jacinta as she already had eighteen years of experience in Torembi, Ningil and Kunjingini and was to continue in Dreikir area for another ten years!

Father Jan Szweda SVD, who was the Divine Word Missionary Provincial Leader in PNG in 2005, recalled his impressions as a young missionary.

Being in Bongos (1980-1981) and then in Yassip, I always admired Sister Jacinta for her commitment and dedication. She was a great bush walker and an excellent driver on the very bad roads. Young nurses walking with her could not keep up with her walking speed. She could handle the many mothers with their babies excellently. There was always order and serious business in the clinic when Jacinta was around. Her inevitable concern was the bad condition of the roads in the area.⁶

A significant stage in the growth of the local Church

The sisters carried out their ministry within the vision of the Wewak Diocese, rejoicing in the growing contribution of national sisters and priests. This is captured in the following account recording the sisters' departure from Wewak for Dreikir:

This morning Sisters Misericordia, Veronica and Sophie set off for Dreikir. This is a significant step for the congregation. The Dreikir area is now serviced by a team of national priests. With Veronica and Sophie also in the area it should be a challenge for growth in the local Church. Our prayers go with them. It will not be easy. But then the Cross is part of the Mission. They were in joyful spirits setting forth this morning. I'm sure this venture would have been close to Catherine McAuley's experience. The poor, the ignorant and the under privileged are certainly in the Dreikir area.⁷

The national priests referred to in the excerpt were: Father John Siere (Dreikir and Aresili), Father Otto Separi (Tau and Bongos), and Father Lawrence Tanu (Yassip-Dato).

Sister Sophie Samiak recalls the departure referred to above:

In 1992 I was asked to go to Dreikir (Feb) and I left Wewak with Misericordia. I remember her saying, "Get into the car, Sophie, and drive to Dreikir." The road was muddy. Misericordia continued: "Sophie you can make it, just go on driving." And that's when I experienced being the missionary going to unknown places. I was reminded of the expatriate sisters. You didn't know the language, the culture, or the place, everything else, but you went because of the need of the people. That idea was in me when I was going. Well, this was how the first sisters came, so why not Sophie? Give it a try and see!⁸

Growing lawlessness – and a young woman's act of courage

Unfortunately, during 1992 there was a serious attack made on Sister Sophie Samiak while on a MCH bush patrol. Sophie was leading the single file of female carriers and nurses, when she was accosted and threatened by a masked youth, demanding money. One of the young carriers raced ahead and placed herself between Sophie and the attacker, who was wielding his bush knife. She cried out: "If you want to touch Sophie, you will have to kill me first!" That sudden act of bravery changed the situation from defence to attack. A second quick reaction

came from the Officer in Charge, Susan Teriken, offering the money in her bilum. The would-be assailant grabbed the money and slunk away into the jungle.⁹

This frightening experience was an indication of the vulnerable situation the sisters were placed in as they travelled the paths on foot or on the roads in ever-deteriorating social conditions. Attacks of theft and vandalism were occurring more frequently on or near the mission station.

The decision to leave Dreikir

Such conditions of lawlessness, and the difficulty of placing sisters with diverse ministries in isolated communities, eventually led to the sisters leaving Dreikir. Their imminent departure was communicated in a letter to the sisters by the National Superior, Sister Joan MacGinley:

My dear Sisters,

No doubt there will be heavy hearts when I pass on this information. At our recent Council Meeting we took the decision that next year (1993) there will be no Sisters of Mercy at Dreikir. In 1979 Sisters Ann O'Regan and Nell Callaghan were the first Sisters of Mercy to work in the parish at Dreikir. In 1980 Sister Jacinta Wiedman went there for Health Services while Nell Callaghan transferred to Kairiru Island to teach in the seminary. I take this opportunity on behalf of all those people who have benefited from the Mercy presence in Dreikir to thank all those sisters whose Apostolates took them to Dreikir. Coming to mind are Ann O'Regan, Nell Callaghan, Jacinta Wiedman, Petronia Gawi, Ann Hook, Theresia Nakankwien, Misericordia Carter, Veronica Lokalyo and Sophie Samiak. Thank you, sisters, for your love and dedication.

Your loving sister,

Joan MacGinley

*National Superior*¹⁰

Members of the last Mercy community were Ann O'Regan, Veronica Lokalyo and Sophie Samiak.

Ann O'Regan's Dreikir reflections: Growth of the local Church

Ann O'Regan offers her reflections on pastoral work in the remote rural area of the Dreikir parish. She pays tribute to the people themselves, and the sisters, priests, catechists, prayer leaders and Church leaders working with them.

These days in the Wewak Diocese there is a strong emphasis on the importance of Liturgy and a Reader's role in proclaiming the Word. Father Waldemar was extraordinary in calling on young women to read even though, in general, having had very little education, they were shy and were not such efficient readers. Over the years I have seen a great strengthening in liturgical ministries such as 'lotu' ministers, communion ministers, music ministers, altar servers, both male and female. Cultural colour has been encouraged in liturgies, especially in processions such as the entrance, bringing of the Good News, offertory and recessional processions. The natural gifts of gardens now make up the offertory gifts, as well as money. Another thing that has been encouraged and has grown in the Church has been financial independence. Lastly there has been a marked

growth of the local Church through an increase of local clergy and religious, and a decrease of foreign missionaries.

In my ten years in the Dreikir-Tau-Bongos-Aresili-Yassip parishes, and later in the Kunjigini parish, I saw great progress in the understanding of the laity of 'We are the Church' and an extensive undertaking of tasks by the laity. I saw women, who were too shy to speak in small prayer group sessions in 1979, begin to take the initiative and by the time I left there in 2003 women were able to stand in front of a microphone in Wirui Sound Shell in Wewak and pray and address a large crowd without constraint. Some of the young women who had helped us in our pastoral work became interested in becoming Sisters of Mercy too, and are still working in this field.¹¹

The closing of Dreikir in 1992 was a significant withdrawal of the sisters from ministry in the isolated areas of the East Sepik Province.¹² Sister Sophie Samiak, with Ann O'Regan and Vero Lokalyo, had the sad duty of closing the convent and leaving the people in this remote area¹³.

Endnotes

¹ Taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Dreikir.

² Approximately from November to May.

³ The details of the arrangements and beginnings were provided by Sister Ann O'Regan.

⁴ Lengths of material.

⁵ As reported by Sister Ann O'Regan, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

⁶ In a personal conversation in Mount Hagen, June, 2005.

⁷ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Dreikir, January, 1992.

⁸ Excerpt from an interview with Sister Sophie Samiak, November, 2005.

⁹ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Dreikir.

¹⁰ Letter dated October 10, 1992.

¹¹ Reflections offered by Sister Ann O'Regan, who was also the constant scribe of the Dreikir chronicle.

¹² In 1991, the Sisters withdrew from the Kambot-Angoram region.

¹³ Information provided by Sister Sophie Samiak, June, 2007.



DREKIKIR (1979-1992)

Founding Community

Ann O'Regan, Nell Callaghan

Ann O'Regan
Misericordia Carter
Ann Hook
Theresia Nakankwien
Jacinta Wiedman

Nell Callaghan
Petronia Gawi
Veronica Lokalyo
Sophie Samiak

Ministries

Pastoral Work, Nursing, Maternal and Child Health Clinics, Practical Training for Catechists, Prayer Leaders, Ministry to Women, and Primary Education.



WEWAK MINISTRY CROSSINGS (1970s and 1980s)

By the 1970s, the Sisters of Mercy in the country were serious and energetic in their attempts to read the rapidly changing 'signs of the times'. They found themselves part of the unfolding events in Church and society, relating closely to the growth of the local Church and the country's preparation for, and consolidation of, political independence. Government and Church policies promoted localisation – the empowerment of indigenous people through preparation for new roles of responsibility. Sisters found ways of adapting in these circumstances. They moved from teaching in primary school to high school, teacher education or vocational centres. Some prepared themselves for pastoral work, catechist training, and training of pastoral workers and lay church leaders.

There were several Mercy crossings in the Wewak Diocese in the 1970s and 1980s as new communities were formed in response to diocesan requests for ministry. The stories of Negrie (1970-1980), Kairiru (1970-1993) and Drekikir (1979-1992), as well as the earlier foundations of Kunjingini, Torembe, Yarapos, Kaindi and Yangoru have already been told.

With the sisters' focus on responding to contemporary needs of Church and nation, sisters moved across geographical boundaries – from the Coast to the Highlands (and vice versa) and to the national capital Port Moresby. New Mercy inter-congregational communities and support groups emerged – in some cases replacing the original more conventional type of living together. A process of intermingling and new bonding was in the community mix for the Mercy Sisters in PNG.

Called beyond familiar borders



Father Kalisz with parishioners.

In 1976, a very significant letter was written by Reverend Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese (who was to succeed Bishop Arkfeld as Bishop of Wewak). It was written to Sister Catherine Courtney, Leader of the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy, to explain directions for the Mercy Sisters throughout the diocese in the independence era and beyond. As some sisters had already begun in the areas mentioned (for example, teaching in government institutions and village pastoral work) and had extended their ministry to formation of catechists and prayer leaders at the parish, deanery and diocesan levels, the letter was an endorsement and encouragement for the sisters to continue and expand their pastoral ministry.¹

Directions offered in Father Kalisz's letter

The future Bishop offers reasons for extending present or adopting future ministries.²

Teaching in government institutions. This was necessary because in the Wewak Diocese "some 80% or more of the students in these high schools are Catholic, while, on the other hand, practically the total expatriate teaching staff is non-Catholic and many are atheists."

Urban pastoral work. This would include the formation of Basic Christian Communities as a way of bringing Christ to the people, Bible study clubs and shared prayer groups as well as the formation of women's clubs. The need for sisters is explained: "True, the aim of the Church in New Guinea is to localise, to hand over the leadership in the Church to the local people in as many areas as possible. But here is the rub – the parish priest on his own cannot find and train these leaders because he is so divided in his work."

Village pastoral work. In this way, the sisters would reach the different groups of the adults and the youths in the villages. The sisters could assist in the selection and training of church leaders and prayer leaders in the village. "Many school leavers even from the lower primary school grades wander around the villages with practically no knowledge of their religion. The adults, too, need much updating in their religious knowledge."

Family counselling services. This would provide education in family planning, counselling people with family and social problems and guidance.

Words of encouragement and endorsement of current ministries

Father Kalisz recommends that the sisters continue in the current ministries on the mission stations and in educational institutions. In words of encouragement to the sisters he concludes the letter:

The Wewak Diocese has been blessed by Divine Providence in having the Mercy Sisters share in this mission work and the fruits of their labour are very evident. One has only to read over what I have said about the areas of their commitment and to know that God has blessed their work with success in all these areas to realise what their work has meant to the establishing of the Church here.

How the sisters responded to the directions in the letter, in Government and Church institutions and in pastoral work, has already been shown.³ The area of family counselling mentioned in the letter was not taken up directly at the time by the Sisters of Mercy but continued to be incorporated into their nursing, pastoral and catechetical work.

Evolving pastoral ministry

The pastoral ministry was developed by the sisters in the diocese. The leadership role the sisters took in this field is outlined by Sister Ann O'Regan.⁴

At first, parish-based methods of ministry were very much in the hands of the parish priest and a paid catechist, whose work was the instruction of catechumens and preparation for the sacramental life of baptised Catholics. After the Self-Study, courses of preparation for village prayer leaders and church leaders were offered while the catechists received ongoing courses at a Diocesan Catechist Centre. The prayer leader was usually a literate village man, who was often quite young, with the ability to lead the village in prayer and song. The church leader, on the other hand, was usually older, who had a good deal of prestige in the village Catholic community, and was seen as the father figure who gathered and cared for his Catholic flock. Some Sisters of Mercy were conducting prayer leader and church leader courses, e.g. the sisters at Negrie.

At this time in the Wewak Diocese there were some married deacons who could perform baptisms and marriages in the diocese. Their status was less than that of a priest and higher than a catechist. In preparation for their ministry, the men completed specially constructed programs organised by Divine Word Missionaries, Joep Heinemans, Leo vander Helm, Harry Janissen and others. However, the married diaconate did not continue as a practice for very long in the Wewak Diocese.

By 1982, through the inspiration of some key members of Movement for a Better World (MBW) a highly structured pastoral plan for parishes was introduced by Bishop Kalisz. Known as the "New Image of the Parish" (NIP) it was based on the idea of Small Christian Communities, where in each small unit of about thirty people, everyone could be involved, instead of just a few key people. The first step in this plan was a four-day village retreat called the Retreat of the Christian Community. Religious sisters, priests and some lay people, mainly prayer leaders, worked in area teams to learn to give the retreat and then to give it in every village of every parish. This in itself was a huge undertaking, considering there were approximately 40 parishes of various sizes in the East Sepik Province, and an average parish would have between 15 and 20 villages. Not every parish could begin at the same time so Boikin Parish became the pilot parish, and then others joined in. Mostly, the Sisters of Mercy took a leading part in the training of small area teams and in the giving the retreats.

At first, Sister Misericordia Carter, Father Michael Marai, Father Gregory SVD and Brother Tom comprised the first diocesan team, while Sisters Cephas Philben, Joan MacGinley, Maria Jean Rhule and Ann O'Regan were the backbone of the area groups. After Sister Misericordia left the diocesan team, Sister Ann Hook took the lead, and after Ann was badly injured in a road accident, Sister RoseMary Baker replaced her on the team. Parish priests were involved in organising and conducting retreats in the villages, but it was the sisters, encouraged by the bishop, who kept the momentum going. With the help of a few key priests, they nurtured the NIP program so that it eventually developed into a diocesan based program – the Program for the Renewal of the Diocese (PRD).

The Wewak sisters venture into new ministries

The development of new ministries, described in the stories so far, was but the start of many others. Guided by the diocesan pastoral letter,⁵ sisters embarked on new ministries in small religious communities or ventured forth in communities with lay people. These short-

term ministries were adopted by individual sisters in response to parish and diocesan needs. The attempt to meet the contemporary needs to promote the growth of the local Church had profound effects on the type of community life practised at the time as sisters went forth as individuals or in small diverse groups.

It took courage and faith to embark on these temporary ministries which, while offering vital contacts with the people in their daily lives, demanded a great deal of energy to adapt to local circumstances. Furthermore, sisters experienced a degree of isolation from their regular religious communities. Mercy Sisters were living beyond the 'convent walls' and travelling in hazardous circumstances, in ways that very few other men and women of other religious congregations of the time were prepared to follow.

Particular ministries, showing the sisters' concern for the wider needs of Church and society, including working in government institutions, are now outlined.

Christian Living Centre: *Lait bilong moning* (Light of the Morning) 1974-1976

A small community was formed from Yarapos in 1974 to provide a home and a Christian environment for young women interested in the Mercy way of life. This community of sisters lived at the Christian Living Centre, a house on the Wewak beachfront, which they called 'Lait bilong moning'. The teachers commuted to Yarapos each day, while Sister Jill Stringer carried out her work as Tutor Sister at Wewak Hospital, Boram. The young women went to their daily work. Sister Denise Coghlan was the originator of this form of community living. Those who formed the community at different times were Sisters Denise Coghlan, Carmel McCormick, Maura O'Shaughnessy and Jill Stringer. While none of the young women felt called to the Mercy way of life, one responded to the call of religious life. Theresia Solatum joined the Franciscans at Aitape and later became their congregational leader.

Maprik High School

In 1974, Sister Marie (Leonie) Williams from Negrie was appointed to the staff of the government high school at Maprik. Marie taught at the school, visiting her community at Negrie once during the week and on the weekends, a commitment which proved to be quite exhausting in terms of the hazardous road travel involved. Marie also felt a growing desire to be involved in pastoral ministry. Consequently, this high school ministry was soon taken up by sisters stationed at Kunjingini, working in collaboration with the Marist Brothers. These sisters were: Marie Williams, Madeleine O'Dea, Maura O'Shaughnessy, Margaret Scroope, Mary Stallard and Beverly Whitton.

The sisters carried out their ministries not only in their teaching of Religious Education and academic and practical subjects, but also by devoting their time and energy to building up the school community through localisation practices and pastoral ministry. A former Headmaster of Maprik High School, John Colwell, spoke of how the sisters were a support to him in achieving his goals for the good of the students, localisation of staff and relationship with the local town and village community.⁶

Angoram High School (1983)

Sister Maureen Grant (former Principal of Yarapos) was asked by the provincial education authorities to be part of the establishment of a remote new school at Angoram by the Sepik River. Maureen accepted the position of deputy to be a support to the national Headmaster and staff and assist in the setting up of this new school. Most of Maureen's day and evening was spent at the school teaching and tending to the problems of building and maintenance of an isolated rural campus. Maureen lived in a small teacher's house and also carried out a pastoral role with students and female staff. She was accompanied there at first by Sister Jeannine Kalisz, who was involved in pastoral ministry. When Sister Maria Jean Rhule was engaged in pastoral ministry in the villages of the Keram River parishes, she also made her base there until Maureen's new appointment in Wewak. Then Maria Jean moved to a room under the parish house at Angoram, and when she was joined by Sister Theresia Nakankwien, both sisters moved to the parish house at Kambot.

Wirui – Bishop Leo Day High School (1985-1988)

At the request of the Catholic Agency of the diocese, Sister Maureen Grant accepted the position of Headmistress at a town school recently established near the diocesan headquarters at Wirui, called Bishop Leo Day High School. For three years, Maureen and Nell Callaghan, who was secretary to the bishop, lived in a small teacher's house on the campus. Maureen continued in her role of assistance to and promotion of the national staff, and was busily engaged in all areas of administration, plant maintenance and pastoral care. When Maureen left, the school was localised in administration and staff.

Passam National High School (1980-1992)

In 1979, Sister Frances Hanrahan, who was teaching at the seminary at Kairiru, was invited to apply for a position at Passam National High School. This institution, along with similar institutions at Sogeri (Port Moresby), Aiyura (Eastern Highlands), Keravat (East New Britain), catered for upper secondary students selected from all over PNG. Brother Pat Howley FMS, formerly Headmaster of St Xavier's Provincial High School on Kairiru, was the first Principal, and he was keen to have one or two Marist Brothers and Sisters of Mercy on the staff. He saw them as essential, not only for teaching their specialisations, but also to be actively involved in pastoral care of the male and female students. He also saw the religious as helping to be a Christian and uniting influence on staff and students. Sister Frances Hanrahan, who specialised in Mathematics, and was to be Dean of Women, outlines her anticipation of this new move:

The school has only been operating for six months and next year it will have its first intake of girls – 40 girls and about 300 boys. It will be a couple of months before I will know if I am accepted... The present principal is a Marist Brother... Passam is only half an hour from Wewak by road so we would not be far from the sisters in there.⁷

Other sisters who followed Fran at Passam National High School were Miriam Devine (Science) and Cynthia Griffin (English and Social Science). Because of their specialisations, these sisters, in addition to their role as Dean of Women, were often Department Heads, and in that capacity, supervised and encouraged the emerging national staff. By the time Cynthia, who was requested to be Deputy Principal, completed her contract, the staff was almost

completely localised.

Girls vocational centre

In 1977, after having spent some time teaching at Yrapos, Sister Alberta Bussutin from Negrie, moved to Kaindi to commence the vocational centre for female school-leavers at Kaindi. Father Eddie Bauer SVD was the instigator behind this particular diocesan venture. He believed it would cater for the needs of the many urban school leavers whose educational opportunities were lost by a system of selection at the end of Grade Eight. Similar centres had been set up on the rural mission stations at Kunjingini, Kairiru and Yangoru. Practical and domestic lessons were offered to provide the young people with life skills in a Christian environment and to prepare them to face the future with hope. It was also felt that these young men and women had ways of helping their own people during times of rapid change. Sister Alberta, in establishing this new venture, faced the teething problems of designing the curriculum and putting it into action. Alberta was followed by Sister Helen Lieffering (Franciscan) who was Father Bauer's cousin.

Tangugo Pastoral Training Centre – Wewak

At the request of Father Wim Valckx, the founder and Director of the Tangugo Pastoral Training Centre, Sister Marie (Leonie) Williams who was involved in pastoral ministry in the parish of Negrie, joined the staff of this important diocesan centre in 1976. It was the pivotal centre for pastoral and catechetical training for the Wewak Diocese. At the end of the year, Leonie returned to Negrie to become part of the team involved in full-time pastoral ministry.⁸ On occasions, Mercy Sisters, particularly those involved in pastoral and catechetical ministry throughout the diocese, contributed to the programs.

Formation with Rosary Sisters

In 1975, the Rosary Sisters requested that Maureen Grant, (then at St John's Seminary) move from Kairiru to Mushu Island to take responsibility for novitiate formation. This story has been told, with reflections from the Rosary Sisters.⁹ Other Mercy Sisters, including Sisters Denise Coghlan and Brendan Daley, contributed to the education and spiritual formation of the Rosary Sisters.



Sister Brendan with Rosary Sisters.

Religious education and formation of teachers

Sister Anne Frances Carroll (formerly of Ulupu) was transferred to Yarpas to be a key member of the diocesan team for the co-ordination of Religious Education and spiritual formation of teachers in the diocese. Reaching the numerous Catholic schools required several weeks' travel, covering vast and uncertain distances on dangerous roads, seas and the Sepik. The purpose of the team was to update the teachers in religious knowledge and practice, guide their Christian formation and offer spiritual retreats. The intention was that future co-ordination of these programs would be taken over by the national teachers themselves. Sister Carmel McCormick was also involved in this rewarding, but arduous, ministry for a time.

Sister Anne Frances comments on this ministry:

As Diocesan Religious Education Co-ordinator, I was part of a very supportive and well integrated team with two Marist Brothers, Canute and Terry. With over ninety Catholic schools throughout the East Sepik, at that time, we were constantly on the roads, rivers and skies of the Sepik as we moved to where teachers were rather than their coming to us. Our programs of faith development and in-service were much appreciated by the teachers but more importantly they valued the opportunity to meet with other teachers and with us in their remote stations.¹⁰

Kambot-Angoram (1987-1991)

After leaving Yangoru, Sister Maria Jean Rhule continued her pastoral ministry in the many isolated villages along the Keram River. With its head waters on the northern side of the central mountain ranges this waterway gathers force to form a mighty tributary of the Sepik River. Boat travel along the river and its side water ways in the mountains tests the endurance of travellers, subjected to scorching heat, tropical downpours and extremely long hours in a cramped vessel. For example, the journey for pastoral work from Kambot to Wusitak would take 8 hours by motor canoe or 24 hours by paddle canoe.

From a home base at Angoram, Maria accompanied the parish priest of the Kambot-Angoram Parish, Father Joe Pirzkall SVD on his sacramental and pastoral visits. It often took several weeks of travel in scorching heat on the Sepik River to complete each round. Something of the remoteness, the energy and sense of humour required for this ministry to the marginalised is revealed through excerpts from Maria's letters¹¹ What may not be obvious to the reader are the weeks of practical preparation required for each pastoral round and the years of experience that led to Maria, the parish worker, being at peace with the uncertainties and the ever unexpected!

During the ten days before Christmas we visited Raten, Sembini, Pampan, Bobanten and Rangam. As the water wasn't too high we had to go from Bobanten to Rangam by dingy - no motor, only paddles. Trying to be helpful with the pulling I almost turned the dingy over twice, was thanked for my efforts but told my job was to sit still and pray!!! We came back to Pampan for Christmas. The evening Mass went well, but Christmas day dawned very wet so we had a late start - however managed to make it as far as Won for a second Mass just as the sun was setting.

During the past couple of months most of my time has been spent in what is called the Grass-country. Bishop Raymond is coming out in May to bless two new village churches and give Confirmation. The last time a Bishop was in the area was 1954. It is a difficult area and has been passed from one parish to another. Trying to work out who is able, that is, has been baptised, received Confession and Communion and has their marriage blessed – to receive Confirmation – has been a major task. The records have not been kept up to date. Hopefully, all is straight now. Francis Malaso – local church worker – is helping with the instructions.¹²

Sister Theresia Nakankwien joined Maria for the final year of this demanding but otherwise neglected ministry and was involved in giving spiritual retreats, Bible courses, prayer and church leader courses and working with women and youth. Theresia explained that this was in accordance with the 'New Image of the Parish' (NIP) program carried out in the villages and outstations of the Marienberg and Kambot parishes.¹³



Sisters Joan, Theresia, Maria Jean and Father Joe Pirzkall.

The lighter side of events - A dip in the Sepik

Sister Joan MacGinley offers a reflection on a mishap that threatened their lives while travelling on the Sepik River. Relating this nearly 20 years after the event, Joan disguises a dangerous situation in humorous tones.

On the 21st September, 1988, three of our sisters knocked on the Pearly Gates but Peter said "Mi no redi long opim dua long yutripela".¹⁴ Sisters Cephas, Petronia and I were on our way back to Wewak. Petronia was preparing for her final profession and Sister Cephas and I had come to Ambunti on the Sepik River to talk to her family. It was a glorious morning and we were speeding back along the mighty Sepik River in a dugout canoe.

Father Jan Czuba had insisted that the two sisters sit in cane chairs so our centre of gravity was high and when the young inexperienced driver sped around a bend in the river the canoe tipped over and upended almost all the occupants into the home of the crocodiles. Petronia was quick enough to anticipate our hasty dip into the water and jumped in. Not so Cephas and Joan, neither of whom could swim! The canoe was churning round in the water, but fortunately the school teacher who was travelling with us was able to swim and turn off the engine. Meanwhile Father had been sucked under the canoe and Petronia was wondering who to save first, Joan or Cephas? while the driver was crying. The cane chairs were the part of the problem that we overbalanced, but they were also our means of survival. We hung on to them like grim death. Cephas was wondering "Where are all the crocodiles?" while I was saying to myself "Thank God all my troubles will be over soon, and the sisters will have to have fresh elections". (I was the Superior at that time). Eventually we were rescued. People in another boat helped us back into the canoe and we proceeded on our way.

Not so the poor "cocky" that Father was taking to Wewak to give to his friend. It was trapped in a cardboard box so now on cold windy nights a strange sight can be seen at the bend in the Sepik River where there is a whirlpool. A cockatoo wearing sunglasses and sporting a camera is trying to thumb a ride to Wewak. (Cephas lost her sunglasses and Petronia her camera!)¹⁵

The uniqueness and difficulties of new ventures

Venturing forth in an effort to meet the needs of Church and nation was a pattern followed by the Mercy Sisters in the various dioceses.¹⁶ The adjustments made on behalf of mission initiatives within communities and beyond familiar boundaries was a growing phenomenon. This contrasted with the regular community life on a mission station as it was lived in earlier times.

The Wewak examples given attempt to cover the trend during the 1970s and 1980s and may be understood in conjunction with the Vicar General's letter,¹⁷ and interpreted in the light of the momentum generated by Vatican II and the Self-Study to meet the needs of the Church and an independent Papua New Guinea. The enthusiastic, serious and active response of the sisters themselves cannot be overlooked. They were part of the diocese, part of an emerging local Church, and were willing to offer their insights and visions and follow them through. These brave sisters, along with their sisters in the other dioceses, created new ways of life and ministry for religious women of the Church in Papua New Guinea.

This era saw the closure of several Mercy missions. With localisation of primary education, limited staff positions available in the Departments of Education and Health, and rapid localisation of the Church, it was difficult to maintain a viable community of sisters in the isolated rural areas. The 1970s saw the first closing of the communities, with the sisters' withdrawal from Torembe in 1974. This was followed by Ulupu in 1976, Negrie in 1980, and Yangoru in 1981. For somewhat similar reasons, including that of danger and insecurity in travelling and diminishing number of expatriate sisters, further closures occurred some ten years later with the withdrawal of sisters from Dreikir (1992) and from Kairiru (1993).

Bishop Marai's reflections: A tribute to Sister Misericordia

Branching out in ones and twos was both a call and a challenge. Bishop Michael Marai, former Bishop of Goroka, captures some of the adjustments required in a review of Sister Misericordia's leading role in pastoral work as Chairperson of the "New Image of the Parish" (NIP) program in the Wewak Diocese.

The program must be followed. She would show the same self-discipline on the road journeys along the north coast to Boikin and Dagua, inland to Passam, Bagiman and Bongos, and further down towards the mighty Sepik River to Kanduanum and Kambot. She would not claim any privileges on account of her sex or age and would take her turn at the wheel, to share the driving. This could take up to 13 hours on all kinds of roads and weather conditions and there was never a word of complaint.

There were cultural difficulties that Sister Mis had to face. Inevitably there is a big gap between the teaching and the life of the Church. In so many ways the liturgy, Sacraments, and the lives of the people do not meet the ideals of Christianity regarding love, obedience, loyalty, faithfulness and service of others. It must be remembered that the Word of God was brought in by missionaries of the western culture. The result is it is difficult to pick out what is the Word of God and what is the culture. To explain this using a local metaphor, one might ask "What is more important, the string bag or what is in the string bag? (e.g. the precious betel nut). It seems that in the case of conversion to the Christian religion, the outside covering of western culture has made the big impact and not what is inside. This has led to the whole question of a clash of cultures, which has been exacerbated by domineering and paternalistic western attitudes."¹⁸

Sister Misericordia grappled with these cultural misunderstandings and dilemmas of building local Church. She made great efforts to understand the people, their dreams, desires and levels of faith. But this adaptation was required also on the part of those on the team, and the Bishop also mentions what he had gained personally from close interaction with Sister Misericordia and the others on the team. His reflections are included here to show the challenges faced not only by Misericordia, but all those sisters involved in these new ventures.

A Bishop's tribute to the Sisters of Mercy

Anthony Burgess DD, Bishop of Wewak, pays tribute to the work of the Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak Diocese (1957-2007):

In the early years of the mission in Wewak Diocese, Bishop Leo always set up his mission stations with a church, a school and an aid post. In the early years this was a real challenge getting the necessary supplies to help the people.

The Sisters of Mercy have been pioneers of Education in the East Sepik for just on 50 years, catering for the Christian Education of young girls at Torembe, from Mercy Secondary College at Yarapos and in the many small mission schools where they taught. The sisters have been very involved in the health services run by the Church in the diocese. Many of these centres are still functioning today while some have closed over the years.

The indigenous sisters continue the missionary role of the pioneer Sisters of Mercy. Along with education and health services, they are involved with the priests and local lay leaders

in pastoral work. The number of our PNG Sisters of Mercy speaks for itself of the zeal and example of the early sisters.¹⁹

A Post-Script

At the Mercy Sisters' Jubilee celebrations in Wewak, Bishop Tony Burgess²⁰, made a public statement pointing out that the remote Sepik people were among the most disadvantaged in the country and the government was not providing incentives to attract enough teachers and nurses there. Children were deprived of schooling and communities of health services²¹. The Bishop challenged the government to bring services to the most disadvantaged, as Mother Damian desired of her sisters fifty years ago.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pastoral Letter from Reverend Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese, May 20, 1976.
- ² The following text is based on a letter from Reverend Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese, May 20, 1976.
- ³ In the accounts of the sisters' ministries in the Wewak Diocese in previous chapters (and including the sisters' ministries in the Highlands).
- ⁴ Written by Sister Ann O'Regan for this publication, May, 2006.
- ⁵ Pastoral Letter from Reverend Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese, May 20, 1976.
- ⁶ In a conversation at Sogeri National High School, Port Moresby (approximately 1999).
- ⁷ In the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kairiru.
- ⁸ An account of Sister Marie's pastoral ministry has been recorded in the section on Negrie in Chapter 6.
- ⁹ In the Kairiru account of Chapter 6.
- ¹⁰ Email communication from Sister Anne Frances in Ireland, dated May 19, 2007.
- ¹¹ Letters written circa 1990, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- ¹² From recollections in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- ¹³ From an interview in Mount Hagen, May, 2005.
- ¹⁴ Literally translated as: 'I'm not ready to let you into heaven'.
- ¹⁵ An email communication to Sister Irene Callanan dated May 7, 2007.
- ¹⁶ The sisters' new ventures in ministry have been outlined in Chapter 3 as well as in subsequent chapters.
- ¹⁷ Pastoral Letter from Reverend Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese, May 20, 1976.
- ¹⁸ First dictated by Bishop Michael Marai in Goroka in 1989, and later published in the Catholic Leader.
- ¹⁹ Communicated by email from Wewak, April 11, 2007.
- ²⁰ In a speech at the celebrations at DWU – St. Benedict's Campus for the Mercy Sisters' Jubilee and fifty years of teacher education in the East Sepik, June 2, 2007.
- ²¹ The churches provide the majority of health services in the rural areas.

Chapter 7

NORTH SYDNEY MERCY SISTERS TO PUMAKOS, ENGA – 1965

In 1965, a third major foundation of Australian Sisters of Mercy was made in the Western Highlands of New Guinea. The Apostolic Delegate, Dominico Enrici, had just returned from PNG where the Bishop of the vast diocese of Mount Hagen, George Bernarding SVD, had persuaded him that Tsak-Pumakos, which was in the region of Enga, west of the Hagen Range, would make an ideal mission place for sisters. He promptly approached Mother Philomena Ryman of the North Sydney Mercies.

Mother Philomena and a band of sisters responded courageously to the Apostolic Delegate's request. The North Sydney Mercy Sisters later commenced a long involvement in teacher education at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen.



Sisters Francis Harcombe (Superior), Clare (de Paul) Gilchrist, Helen (Augustine) McDonell,
Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft.

TO PUMAKOS - ENGA IN THE MOUNT HAGEN DIOCESE (1965-1994)

Prior to the Apostolic Delegate's request for sisters for Pumakos, the Mercy leaders of the Sydney Archdiocese had been unable to send sisters on overseas missions because, in Mother Philomena's words, the "need for nuns in the schools was at its peak". However, by this time the school situation had improved, and when Mother Philomena put the Apostolic Delegate's request to the sisters, it was received with enthusiasm. However, in her practical and responsible way, Philomena first went to Pumakos, with Sister Marie Agnes, matron of the Mater Hospital, to check things out for herself, before giving her final word of approval. With great delight, she communicated all of this news to Mother Damian in Brisbane, who was not surprised at the request for sisters for Enga, as it was then part of the Wewak Diocese under Bishop Arkfeld's jurisdiction. The two Mercy leaders were kindred spirits and were soon to develop a close friendship through their love of mission among the peoples of PNG.

In 1968, the Sisters of Mercy were requested by Bishop Bernarding to assist in teacher education at Holy Trinity Teachers College which was being set up for the Highlands dioceses at Mount Hagen. Without hesitation, Mother Philomena offered new sisters to support both the Enga and Mount Hagen missions.

To understand the importance of these requests we need to step back 20 years earlier to the beginning of missionary activity in Enga.

First Catholic missionaries³ enter Enga

Enga, with a population of 200,000, was a vast mountainous area west of the Hagen Range. It was one of the last areas of the Territory of New Guinea to be opened to Europeans and put under Australian Administration. The administrative centre, comprising a tiny cluster of bush buildings at the side of a long, soggy, downhill airstrip capable of taking DC3 aircraft, was set up at Wabag in 1945. Radio transmission and infrequent air traffic were the only means of contact with the outside world, apart from foot travel along the narrow precarious paths worn smooth throughout the centuries by the people in their daily lives of subsistence farming and hunting, and through their commercial exchanges further afield.

The ridges and ranges of Enga stood majestically at 3,850 metres above sea level, with their slopes falling 2,000 metres to the valley floors below. One of four main valleys in the eastern half of the district, known as the 'hanging valley', was the extremely fertile Tsak Valley. As soon as the region was officially opened in June 1947, missionaries of the various churches, including the Catholic Church, came in haste. Among the first to climb over the Hagen range were an American, Father William Ross SVD, who had founded their mission at Mount Hagen in 1934, and his companion, a tall, young, red-headed Dutchman, Father Gerry Bus SVD. Walking on the third day, they descended into the densely populated Tsak Valley and made their first contact with the people, noting that Pumakos would make a good mission centre. Continuing on to Sari, they settled at Sangurap, near the present centre of the Diocese of Wabag. Father Bus made this his base to establish the Catholic Church in Enga.

Father Donkers establishes the mission at Pumakos

Father Jacques Donkers SVD⁴ was appointed the first parish priest, and through his kind and quiet personality and good relationship with the people, he succeeded in acquiring enough land for a large mission station at Pumakos, as well as for numerous outstations. His companion, Father Franz Bekerom SVD, arranged for the people to cut down trees from the surrounding mountain sides and saw them into lengths with the hand saws he had left with them. After collecting these he replaced the original bush structures with a presbytery and a large permanent church. In his drive for education, characteristic of the Divine Word Missionaries, he built schools there and in the surrounding villages, and soon he had catechists and teachers from the coast around Alexishafen to teach the youngsters. Pumakos became a hive of intellectual activity at junior primary level! – but there were not enough qualified teachers to take the students further. For upper primary level, only selected boys were chosen to make the journey over the Hagen Range to board at the diocesan primary school at Banz.

Father Krol's wish to have sisters at Pumakos

Father Tony Krol SVD, who succeeded Father Donkers as parish priest, dreamt of having sisters on his station for teaching and health care. He invited the Holy Spirit Sisters from Par to visit the station and asked them for sisters, but they had to refuse as they had none to spare. However, when they left they promised the young priest that they would pray that someday sisters would come. It seems from the events that were to follow that their prayers were indeed answered.

Mother Philomena's prompt and practical response

Mother Philomena responded swiftly to the Apostolic Delegate's request for sisters for mission. Many decades later, at the age of 90, she recalled events with a clarity and freshness as if they had just happened!

The arguments that the Apostolic Delegate put to me were persuasive ones. Owing to severe drought at the large mission station at Fatima on the eastern side of the Hagen Range, the central primary school could no longer feed the many students selected from the western side of the Range (which today comprises the Diocese of Wabag covering the entire Province of Enga). The only solution was seen for the Engan students to return and to be educated at a new location at Pumakos – provided that Australian sisters could be persuaded to come to do the teaching! Pumakos was a beautiful and delightful place in the very fertile Tsak Valley and if Catholics didn't respond, "other people would certainly step in and take it".



I put the proposal to the community on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, 1964, and with their unanimous support, proceeded to ask for volunteers because when they took their vows there was no question of overseas mission. However, I was determined to see the situation myself, before committing our sisters there. Mother Marie Agnes Hutchison, Matron of the Mater Hospital and Councillor, accompanied me to Pumakos, and we stayed with the sisters at Goroka on our way. We found that a house had been built as a convent by Father Bekerom, and a NZ lay missionary and his family, Colin and Mary Bellett with their children, David and Angela, were living in it. It was suitable, but I could see that it was an old building, and I asked that extensions be planned once the sisters moved in and could see for themselves what would be best. In preparation and planning I had to be practical and consider the needs of the sisters as it would be their home for many years. In actual fact, some time was to pass before the extensions were completed, and the kitchen was made bigger, and bathroom, toilet facilities, a sewing room and a laundry were added.

Although the original request was for two sisters, our Council decided to send four. Their names were announced in the community on the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy 1964. Sister Mary Francis Harcombe was chosen as Superior, a gracious, caring sister who would have the responsibility of establishing real community with the sisters, the priests and the people; Sister Clare (de Paul) Gilchrist, who had already spent 20 years at the Maternity Hospital, North Sydney, and who had demonstrated through the years her adaptability to most circumstances with a great spirit of faith; Sister Helen (Augustine) McDonnell, with a background of strong faith, ability as a teacher, and again a person of adaptability. Sister Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft, the youngest of the group, a born teacher, strong in faith, destined to maintain the spirit of the foundation, was the fourth member of the team.⁵

Thus it happened that, 100 years after the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, from Liverpool in England in 1865, four sisters set out on a mission foundation to a people in a remote corner of New Guinea. For both sisters and people, it was to be, in effect, a 'first contact', yet an enduring one.

The sisters' arrival at Pumakos

After a missioning ceremony at North Sydney,⁶ the sisters set out on their journey northwards from Sydney to Mount Hagen. From there they had to separate to fit into the small mission plane. On the first flight to Pumakos, Bishop Bernarding accompanied Mother Philomena and Sister Francis. On the second flight, there were Sisters de Paul, Augustine and Imelda. Their eyes widened as they realised the unimagined ruggedness and remoteness as the light plane did a tight circle within the mountain walls to touch down on the short, narrow airstrip. As they stepped on to Engan soil, they received a very warm welcome. The priests of the Enga District had gathered to meet them. A large crowd of parishioners had also assembled in the church, and the sisters were impressed with the faith of the people. They were also amazed to see so many old before their time, particularly the women. They made a mental reservation, that if they did nothing else, they would work for the betterment of the women and children.

The sisters' beginnings at Pumakos Regional School

Sister Margaret Shakeshaft reflects on the beginnings of the school:

We soon found out what it meant for Pumakos to be a regional school – all the schoolboys of the whole Wabag area, after finishing the lower standards in their own places, came to Tsak for further education. Father Krol told us there were 900 children in 'English' schools or local bush schools altogether in the district and we found we were in charge of a school of about 400 students, mostly boys. There were two New Ireland teachers, Lawrence and Kevin, who had come with the Standard Four and Five boys from Fatima.

Apart from Pumakos, our first students came from Par, Wanepap, Pompabus, Sari, Sikaro, Pina and Laiagam. Some of the priests would drive the students, but most of them walked by themselves over the mountains. The first year I only had three girls from Pumakos in Standard Five and Helen's Standard Six class were all boys. In the second year my girls in Standard Six were joined by about six girls from Ulga who came to Pumakos as boarders. After that, even though the girls were fewer in number, they were actually coming from Pumakos because we were working hard to achieve that – to get equal numbers. When we enrolled children for Standard One each year we told the parents in Tsak Valley that we wanted an equal number of boys and girls.

The clothing the children wore was very poor. The sisters in Australia gave us money and we sewed different coloured laplaps⁷ for each class. Because water was icy cold in the fast running streams, we used to have a



School Assembly, Pumakos, with Sr. Margaret



Gymnastics at Pumakos.



School Girls, Pumakos.

bucket, towel and soap in the classrooms so the children could wash their hands and keep the books clean. One of my school friends gave me a subscription to the *National Geographic* for the school. The children really enjoyed looking at the pictures and seeing many things very different from their own experiences and culture. They were always willing to learn and seemed to really appreciate us being with them in the Valley.⁸

The beginning of health care

Sister Clare Gilchrist, triple-certificated nurse, recalled the beginning of health care at Pumakos.

After more than 20 years in the maternity section of the Mater Hospital in North Sydney, I found myself installed in a two-room building of bush materials. The people had often asked Father Krol for a nurse of their own and as soon as they heard that a nurse was on the way, they gathered to build the 'hospital'. All equipment and medical supplies were provided by the Mater. Now I see an average of 100 patients a day, and I go to two outstations each week. Since September, 1966, I've been keeping good records and since that time I've seen 8,787 patients. Mario is a semi-trained nurse (dokta-boi) and is my faithful assistant.

In the second year I was able to set up a clinic of permanent materials for the care of the sick. Mr Frank Thomas, a builder from Lane Cove, Sydney, and his friend Mr John Denny, gave two months of their time freely to build a proper hospital and clinic. The congregation paid their fares, supplied materials and generally set the place going. It was a New Guinea 'Mater' Hospital of 30 beds. When they left we had two wards, a delivery room, a small maternity ward and an office-storeroom. They also returned later that year, bringing with them Mr Ken Park of Lindfield, a master builder. They stayed five weeks and built girls' quarters for the boarding school - dormitories, dining room, kitchen, recreation room and toilet block.⁹



When Clare Gilchrist first opened her small bush hospital in Pumakos, women began to come to her for help in delivering their babies. Occasionally the babies were premature, and in these circumstances in the remote areas, they would usually die. Clare knew that a humidicrib could save their lives. But there was no such thing available in the bush hospital. Undeterred, Clare soon came up with an appropriate solution. The small baby was tucked up inside a carton over which she made a plastic tent, supported by bamboo. Outside the tent she had a kettle on the boil over a small primus stove. A plastic tube led from the spout and through a small hole in the plastic covering. This constant inflow of air helped the tiny one to breathe. Clare's inventiveness was

capped off by applying milk to the baby's mouth with a small eye dropper. Thus, over the years, many tiny patients were able to breathe, gain sustenance and strength, and in the end survive.

Pumakos – a home of hospitality

Pumakos was known as a place of welcome throughout the diocese. Father Krol would encourage priests who were feeling the effects of isolation on their remote mission stations to take some time to recuperate there. He knew that the homely atmosphere, the sisters' care, nourishing food, and the refreshing Highlands' climate would all contribute to restore the spirits of those weighed down with worries and difficulties. He told the sisters that if they did nothing more than create a home where the priests were welcome, they would have done a wonderful thing for the mission.

Meanwhile, Father Krol introduced the sisters to daily mission life. After regular hours of ministry, they enthusiastically accompanied him on treks to outstations for baptisms, confirmations and calls to the sick and dying. Father Krol was extremely sensitive to cultural mores and carefully monitored the sisters' progress as they sought an understanding of the language and the traditional ways of the people of the various clans in the valley. After a short induction, the sisters, particularly Sister Margaret, helped with preparation for the exchange of the fresh vegetables and supplies for the twice-weekly Wewak-Pumakos plane flights. In addition, the sisters trained and supervised the domestic girls, who in time, took on reliable duties in cooking, cleaning and laundry. Firm, caring friendships developed between them.

Localisation of the primary school

The sisters maintained the school at Pumakos for seven years, working assiduously for the Christian education of the students, and for the goal of localisation. At first, nearly all the students were male, but with the sisters' encouragement the number and retention rates of female students increased. The sisters were helped in their task of keeping students at school by the dedication of the 'schools officer', Elias Ete, a young man of small stature, but amazingly resilient constitution, who crisscrossed the rugged slopes on foot to check with parents and school authorities on reasons for any drop in student attendance. He carried out these duties in all weathers and for several decades till his retirement.¹⁰ As the schools in the other parts of the Enga District developed, they took their own students, diminishing the concentration of students on Pumakos. The sisters' task of localisation was achieved soon after the introduction of the National Teaching Service in 1971 and the sisters left the school at the end of 1973. Some of the sisters on the staff were Mary Francis Harcombe, Helen McDonell, Margaret Shakeshaft, Anthony Mary (Patricia) Crowe, Mary Matthew (Kathleen) Robertson, Jennifer Bailey and Gabrielle (Magdalen) Flood.

Meeting wider educational needs

Despite localisation at Pumakos, the educational needs of teachers and students in Enga were not neglected by the sisters. When the National Teaching Service was introduced, Sister Helen McDonell was employed by the Public Service as Inspector for three years (1971-1973) to help the teachers of all the schools of the Administration, Catholic, Lutheran and Seventh

Day Adventist agencies to work together in the new system. This ministry involved travelling vast distances on dangerous roads and, with no fixed abode, being accommodated in teachers' houses in remote rural places. In 1975, Helen agreed to be Catholic Education Secretary for Enga. Once again, she bravely and energetically confronted the challenge of mountain roads and a degree of homelessness as she sought accommodation in teachers' houses in the near and far Catholic schools. It was several years before she was given a small dwelling as a base in the mission centre at Sangarap.

Sister Helen's request for Marist Brothers for Enga

Helen realised there was an urgent need at the newly built administration high school at Wabag, which was the only high school in the area besides the well established Lutheran one at Pausa. She was concerned for the religious formation, not only of the growing minority of the girls, but also of the boys from the Catholic schools selected to do their secondary education as boarders. They formed the educational elite of Enga who would have the opportunity to go on to upper secondary and tertiary education. After considering the urgency of the situation carefully, Helen asked Archbishop George Bernarding SVD to invite the Marist Brothers, who were experienced teachers in PNG, to look after the Catholic students and teachers in Enga. As a result of this request, four brothers were appointed – two for Wabag High School and two brothers for Par Community School. Brother Brian Leak FMS reflects on Sister Helen's influence on this venture.

In the population of Enga there was a very significant population of Catholics and probably 30 or 40 % of the students in Wabag High School were Catholic students. There were also Catholic teachers there. It was a boarding school as well as a day school so there would have been 100 -150 boarding students at Wabag High School – boys as well as girls, and 400 day students. So the brothers more or less lived on site and we looked after the students there, particularly the Catholic students. The Seventh Day Adventists were very strong, as were the Lutherans in the area, and we were able to work with those groups because their churches tended to work well together, and it enabled us to support the Catholic students at the high school.

I can remember that prior to our coming, Helen visited the area with our regional Superior, Brother Bertrand Webster, and there was one occasion showing the difficulties they had. They had been travelling along the valley of the River Lai towards the Laiagam area, and on the way back, they got caught in a landslide. The falling soil was enveloping their small pick-up truck and they soon realised that they were inexorably being moved with the flowing mud towards the edge of the cliff. They scrambled out through the mud to get to safe ground. The vehicle, which had gone down with the mud was abandoned, but was thankfully retrieved later.

So that was typical of the adventures that people had in those areas. It was quite a challenge for those driving on the roads. As for Helen, she often drove around on her own in a Suzuki so there was always that sort of adventure and the requirement that you had to use your own initiative to get out of very difficult situations. But generally the people were very helpful at that stage, and she built up a very good rapport with them. She was well known, and much loved in the area. She was also our guardian in introducing us to the

area. I have very fond memories of her friendship and kindness, and also she introduced us to the other sisters in the community at Mount Hagen at the teachers college.¹¹

Development of health services and the Pumakos 'Mater' hospital

The people soon learnt that Sister Clare (de Paul) was a person who put a priority on their health and well-being and that of their families. They would call at the health centre or, in an emergency, tap on her bedroom window at night, and know that they would receive care and attention, even if it meant her driving them to the doctor at the neighbouring Lutheran Hospital to receive specialist treatment. As a triple-certificated nurse, Clare used her expertise and adaptability to diagnose and treat the many forms of illness – ulcers, infections, diarrhoea, colds and pneumonia, fever, difficult child births, malnutrition and cuts, and serious wounds from domestic and tribal fights.

In conducting Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinics in the different clan areas throughout the Tsak Valley, Clare saw some devastating cultural effects on women. There was a strong tradition of preference for sons, and this could have very serious consequences on the health, and sometimes the life, of the women who bore only daughters; it could also severely threaten the bond of Christian marriage. In light of this, Clare introduced the Natural Planning Method of birth control (the Billings Method) which she found resonated well with the women. She also tried to counteract the very poor educational opportunities available to girls, and their high drop-out¹² rates from school by giving practical lessons in nutrition and cooking. She formed nine women's clubs for this purpose, and selected some of the women to do further courses in soil and garden management, conducted by a graduate of the Engan Agricultural Centre. Upon completion of their courses, these village women would accompany Clare on her MCH patrols, and if there was any mother in need, such as one trying to cope with newly-born twins, these women would give her individual help at home. This practice continued for about seven years until an outbreak of serious tribal fighting prevented the women from travelling freely. In introducing these practices, Clare involved her helpers in supporting women in their valued domestic roles in traditional society.

For twenty years Clare was in charge of health care at Pumakos, and during that time, she was on the Catholic Health Board and the Provincial Health Board as representative of the churches with the Provincial Government. The various church health bodies in the region worked well together as nearly all the staff were mission trained. However, when the Provincial Government was suspended, accused of mal-administration in the 1980s, the churches were deprived of their united voice. Eventually, the Mater Hospital at Pumakos, which started humbly as a bush structure, grew in size and number of staff. For its constant training of indigenous staff and reliable health services for a large number of patients, the government recognised it as the health centre for the district. There were two 15 bed wards, a 10 bed obstetric ward and general wards of 50 beds.

Early reflections of the pioneer sisters

A former student, Sister Marie Bernadette Seroo SND, offers her impressions of the early days:



Sister Helen was the Inspector as well as the headmistress and most of the men who are now parliamentarians were her students. There was no other Standard Five or Six in Enga – so they came from Wabag and all over the province. There was a boarding school for Standards Four to Six. The boys were in round houses, and then they built a big boarding dormitory for girls, not for the boys. Mr Bellet, the builder, did this. I don't know who built the classrooms. It was well set up when I came. Sister Helen had them all in uniforms, and we had parades and sports events at Wabag. Only a small group was selected to go because of shortage of transport. It was a well-disciplined school. We were the elite.

The clinic was run by Clare (de Paul). In that valley that was THE clinic, any hour of the day or night. The people would tap on the window and call for assistance. There was the Lutheran Emmanuel Hospital at Mambasanda Centre,

but Clare took care of all emergencies, but if she couldn't, then she would drive. There were no other drivers then, the sisters did the driving and it was a two hours' drive there. There were no guard dogs, no security. The relationship with the people was very good – they knew the sisters were there and took care of them.¹³

Sister Josephine Byrnes offers her observations on the pioneer sisters and their interaction with the Engan people:

But the sisters came not only to change things. The sisters themselves gathered a wealth of valuable knowledge as they became more and more familiar with the culture and the traditions of the Melanesians whose way of life was so different from what we have experienced with our western background. For these, there were many 'firsts' which will not easily be forgotten – their first Sunday Mass as they listened to the strangeness of the Enga language and watched the village people at prayer; their first singing as they marvelled at the beauty of the Bird of Paradise plumed head-dresses which are among the people's most treasured possessions; their first visit to the bush house – a low building of wood, bamboo and grass with no windows and a fire in the centre which is always lighted in the evening as a protection against the coldness of the air at an altitude of over 2,000 metres; their first vision of a large live pig tied upside down to a long pole being carried along on men's shoulders for one of their traditional pig-exchange ceremonies.¹⁴

The sisters travel across the ranges to Mount Hagen

When the sisters first came to Enga, travel by air, rare as it was, was more common than by road. The first wheels to touch down in Enga were those of a plane. Once the Highlands

Highway was opened up, the Highlands people, even in the remotest places, using shovels, laboriously made tracks for vehicles in order to make vital links for commercial exchanges, education and health. The year 1968 saw the beginning of journeys over the ranges as the sisters joined the staff of Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen, and the sisters of Pumakos and Mount Hagen maintained their links with one another.

However, there were shorter, but perhaps more difficult treks on foot or by four-wheel drive across the mountains closer to the Pumakos base. These treks occurred when Sister Clare set out on sick calls and the priests went on their pastoral visits to the outstations, accompanied by one or more of the sisters. In 1971, the new church building at Imangabus was just about to be completed when Father Krol drew on the artistic talents of Sister Jacinta Dolan. His request was for a beaten copper tabernacle to grace the new house of God. Jacinta produced an exquisitely designed tabernacle, the outside of which tended to catch the light, showing a motif, not of bread, but of the people's daily fare, the nutritious kaukau.

A new ministry in catechist training for Mercy sisters

With the localisation of primary education, a new need emerged for sisters at Pumakos! The diocesan catechist training centre was to be moved from Kepelam to Pumakos! As the parish priest, Father Tony Krol and the Director, Father Ben Kuhnert SVD, were on leave, the task of organising the building of nine dormitories (carried out by Fidelis Pyangatae) fell on the competent shoulders of Sister Clare. That same year, 1974, Sister Jennifer Bailey was asked by Father Ben to join the Catechist Training Centre (KTC) as a staff member.

To understand the climate in which a decision to have a female staff member in such a male enterprise was made and approved, one may refer to the needs of the local Church, as perceived by the church hierarchy. One such reference is a paper presented by a Highlands Bishop, Fermin Schmidt OFM(Cap) of Mendi Diocese in 1975.

The Catholic Church is still in the process of being born as a local Church. At this stage we have only a handful of local clergy and only three nationals as bishops. It is the responsibility of the bishops of the country to establish the local Church in its entirety. This can be done only with the assistance of missionaries, and other resources from our parent Churches.

... The shortage of priests has compelled the bishops to make extreme use of the more highly trained catechists to actively be in charge of parishes. Many catechists (or evangelists) provide the services of which they are capable. As extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, they conduct Sunday (Communion) services, including instructions, generally modelled on the Mass. This development because of the shortage of priests has been a good thing, and it will be continued, since we know we will never have an adequate number of priests. But there is a point when the shortage of priests brings the efficiency of a mission below the zero point. We are approaching that in many areas; catechist training centres could be given stability and status by the presence of religious sisters.¹⁵

A work of collaboration

Despite the struggle for funding, the centre expanded with increased numbers of catechists from Enga, Western Highlands, Simbu and the Eastern Highlands.¹⁶ A director's house, staff housing and classrooms formed the complex. The catechists and their wives grew garden food for themselves and their families. The basic courses of the two-year program were conducted by Father Ben Kuhnert SVD, Sister Jennifer and Hans Gertringer, an Austrian volunteer – Old and New Testament Bible, liturgy, doctrine, ecumenism, PNG history, geography, sociology, problems of economics, politics and independence, language issues in Enga and Tok Pisin. From the beginning women were given special courses in literacy, health, hygiene and domestic skills. An extra classroom was carried over from the school compound for this purpose. The Austrian volunteers played an important part in the training of the catechists and their wives both at Kepelam and Pumakos. At times Sister Clare offered courses on how to live better lives and to cope with changing ways through hygiene and knowledge of nutrition. Sister Janet Connellan worked for a short time in 1977 as a member of the Catechist Training Centre. Janet informally took on pastoral ministry, with a focus of being a listening presence to the people. Sister RoseMary Baker was on the staff (1981-1984), teaching in the program and specialising in liturgy.



Sister Jennifer Bailey.

Sister Jennifer assumed the role of Directress of the Catechist Training Centre in 1982. As well as overall manager and teacher of residential courses, Sister Jennifer, along with specialist staff, conducted in-service sessions in the parishes, often in conjunction with parish priests. She also supervised the catechists when they carried out their field work practice in the parishes. Staff members were John Reedy (later Director of LCI Goroka) and Mark Kolande who specialised in Pastoral Theology and Counselling Methods, respectively. John's wife, Manjula, a qualified nurse, was a welcome contributor to the health care of the growing mission station personnel. Some Sisters of St Therese involved in the centre at Pumakos or Wanepap lived for a time in community with the Sisters of Mercy. Those on the staff were Sisters Laurentia, Leonie, Marie Goretti and Petra, while students were Sisters Heriberta, Bernadette and Maria Goretti. Veronica Lokalyo, the first Sister of Mercy from Enga, completed her two-year catechist training course and served on the staff for a short while.

Sisters support the new Diocese of Wabag

On March 29, 1982, Hermann Raich SVD was appointed Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Wabag. Enga had been made a separate province several years earlier, and at



Bishop Hermann Raich, Diocese of Wabag.

last, the Engans had their own bishop! With great involvement and enthusiasm, a practical diocesan pastoral plan to strengthen the local Church was formulated – one in which Sisters of Mercy were to play a key role. Sister Jennifer's contribution to the training of catechists was recognised and she continued in charge of the Catechist Training Centre for the most part until 1991. Sister Margaret Shakeshaft returned from Hagen to Enga to assist the fledgling diocese by her work in the Catechist Training Centre (1982-1985). Sisters Helen Law from Parramatta and Ann Hook from North Sydney were recruited from Australia to serve on the staff. The sisters had a close relationship with the Sisters of the Holy Spirit at the Health Centre at Yampu (formerly the leprosarium) and later on, at the Pastoral Centre at Par. Sister Henrilena SSps was much appreciated for her hospitality, cheerful service and excellent cooking!

By this time, the educational foundation of primary education had been laid throughout the diocese, and the Catholic Education system was maintained and administered by the Catholic Education Secretary, John Yangal, who after a period of on-the-job training, had succeeded Sister Helen McDonell in the position. The pastoral needs in the parishes and diocese were met through short residential courses at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre at Par, directed by Father Doug Young SVD, and where Sister Margaret Shakeshaft, living in community with the Holy Spirit Sisters, Miriam and Henrilena, served on the staff for three years.

Bishop Raich continued to cement the close and supportive bond that had grown up among the religious and church workers in this remote, but defined region. Despite the many clans and sub-clans, one major Engan language dominated, and this helped promote a sense of unity among Engans, except when clan loyalty or survival was threatened. As the years

progressed, more and more Engan men and women were involved actively in Church and lay ministries. The Engan Catholics proudly expressed their faith and place in the universal Church as they carried a huge timber cross in pilgrimage from station to station across the mountains. The pilgrimage culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist by Pope John Paul II in the assembled Highlands' gathering of the faithful at Mount Hagen in 1984.¹⁷

National sisters from Enga

Some young Engan women discerned their call to religious life with the Sisters of Mercy. After pursuing the hard road of completing secondary education by correspondence with the sisters, they left to rejoin their communities as qualified teachers and nurses. Two finally professed sisters, Sister Veronica Lokalyo, a trained catechist and pastoral worker, and Sister Claudia Apalenda, who completed her nursing qualifications at Det in the Southern Highlands, worked for some time in the Diocese of Wabag. Working with Sister Clare, Claudia was sensitive to the needs of her older companion, and gradually took on more responsibility in the clinic.

Rapidly changing social situation in Enga

Meanwhile, Enga was being swept along in the turmoil of rapid social change, caught between traditional and modern ways. A widening gap emerged between the youth and the elders, and the teachers, in particular, were facing the clash of cultures in their lives and in their teaching. The introduction of new steel tools and machinery, a cash economy and wage employment had repercussions for the community by changing traditional roles so that the workloads of men were decreased and the domestic responsibilities of women were increased. The encroachment of western ways led to the breakdown in local customs such as food preparation, husband and wife being separated from their extended family and sharing the one house. To some extent, formal education came to be seen as a divisive factor because the system selectively denied most students opportunities to progress to higher education and possibilities for wage employment. The system was geared towards the select few rather than the future way of livelihood of the majority. Girls were more likely to drop out of school than boys, although the stigma of failure tended to affect boys more. All of these changes were happening in Enga within little more than a generation.

Rapid change was accelerated in the 1980s by the discovery of gold at Porgera. This brought instant and untold wealth to a few, but resulted in the social consequences associated with the early days of a gold rush – poverty, homelessness, prostitution, venereal diseases (including HIV/AIDS), neglect of family, highway robbery, gambling, drugs, drunkenness, brutality and urban crime.

At first Pumakos clans refuse to join the fighting

In the social situation of unrest and lawlessness throughout the province, some previous enmities were revived and tribal fighting was used to resolve them. However, the people of the Tsak Valley, particularly those around Pumakos, resisted this trend for some years, devoting themselves fervently to charismatic prayer, a movement which the people themselves had

introduced at grass roots level in 1983. Clare commented on the spiritual resolve and power of prayer at work:

*There was great conversion of heart enabling the Catholic Church at Pumakos to carry out renewal programs throughout the valley. During this time, the people broke spears and promised not to fight and maintain peace. This involved all the Catholic clans of the Tsak Valley. Despite other fights occurring in this period of time, the Yabatani Pausa at Pumakos remained steadfast to their promise to refrain from fighting despite much outside pressure being put on them.*¹⁸

Standing by the people

Everyone in the society was affected by these hard times, and the sisters, together with priests and pastoral workers, were attempting to stand by the people in their struggles. To get an informed woman's perspective on these pressing issues of social change, the Bishop requested Sister Rita Hassett, an experienced missionary from the Goroka and Kundiawa Dioceses and Master's graduate from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), to join the pastoral team at the diocesan headquarters in Sangurap. With her usual vigour, versatility and cultural sensitivity, Rita organised small gatherings in an attempt to help women explore changing needs within the context of family life. Men, in their changing roles, were included in her outreach. This new ministry to people beyond defined church boundaries was not always understood by missionaries with a more traditional approach. Rita often had to face criticism and sometimes antagonism from those who suspected the cultural male domination was being undermined, or who insisted on a more 'religious' approach to mission.

Towards localisation of Pumakos hospital

Clare worked constantly towards localisation, and when she went to Australia for urgent medical treatment, the hospital was nationalised for a year. In 1985, Sister Maureen O'Donnell from Aitape took on duties as Officer in Charge (OIC) of Mercy Hospital, as well as Catholic Health Secretary. Maureen worked conscientiously ensuring high standards were maintained while promoting localisation. Sister Sue Smith arrived from Brisbane in August 1985, and the two young, efficient and well-qualified sisters worked untiringly together to continue the provision of good health care for the people in the Valley – Maureen in the hospital and Sue with the maternal and child health clinics, school health and aid post orderlies. When Maureen returned to Australia, Sue took on duties as Catholic Health Secretary (1988-1991) and responsibility for the hospital (1989-1991), the maternal and child health clinics and supervision of student nurses and aid post orderlies. She continued the demanding task of empowerment of indigenous nursing staff by training them for top level positions of responsibility. In addition, Sue selected further training courses and put specific plans in place for the staff to apply for these. Keeping hospital services available was made all the more difficult by the deterioration of the social situation and the outbreak of tribal fighting in 1989.

Sister Sue Smith recalls something of the normal side of living at Pumakos (1985-1991) before the social disruption.

The air was crisp and cool as I stepped out from the house in the early morning. The kau-

kau leaves were covered with dew. I could smell the soil in the new garden dug nearby. The earth was rich and dark brown. As I looked out across the Tsak Valley, the clouds hung below the peaks of the mountains and wisps of smoke meandered up from the houses nearby. Children's cries and laughter were heard in the creek below as I began another day in Tsak Pumakos. Tsak means 'green valley', once a volcanic crater. Pumakos is approximately 6,500 feet above sea level. I felt fortunate to be here at Pumakos, Wapenamanda District, Enga Province. The Mercy community had been pioneered by the North Sydney Mercies in 1965.

The community during those years was often a combination of Mercies, St Therese Sisters, and Rosary Sisters (National PNG Sisters). A married couple, Marta and Robert Hochgruber, with three small children (from the Austrian Volunteers Group) also lived on the mission station at that time. They often joined us for the evening meal. The parish priest, an SVD, Father Joe Krettek joined us for all our meals; so you could say that it was often like open house. People from the diocese and other areas often visited. There was a Catechetical Training Centre at Pumakos and catechists from all over the Highlands came to live there with their families each year. A health centre and a primary school were also part of the Pumakos mission station.

Many of the PNG Mercy Sisters who lived at Pumakos were in their early formation years. This was such an enriching time for me as we shared community life together. Life was earthy and real. I enjoyed the challenge of a new language and culture, and also the mixture of cultures that we became as a whole community. I learnt a lot from this special time. I believe that I learnt to listen to the earth, to myself, to my God and hopefully, to people more fully, during this time.

The experience of working within a community health centre and eventually managing the health centre is something I will never forget. My capacity as a nurse was stretched and challenged on a daily basis. The local people whom I interacted with taught me so much about the essence of life in all its richness. I was fortunate to be the Catholic Health Secretary for some years, and therefore met a number of people of different cultures and religions within the national health scene.¹⁹

Public letter of protest

Fierce fighting eventually broke out in the valley in 1989. The police seemed unable to address the widespread lawlessness. When female nurses, teachers and other church workers were attacked and assaulted while performing ordinary duties for the community, this was a cause of grave concern for all the sisters of the diocese.

A letter from the Union of Women Religious of the diocese was sent to the Honourable Prime Minister, with copies to *The Post Courier* newspaper, *The Times* newspaper, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Honourable Sir,

We, the Catholic Women Religious of Enga Province, would like to address to you our concern over the apparent decline in Law and Order in the Province/Nation especially in the manner in which it affects the safety and well-being of women.

The fifteen Catholic Women Religious presently residing in the Enga Province met together last Saturday and discussed recent experiences of abuse and harassment encountered while offering services to the community. In many instances these were personal experiences but some were experiences of women church workers in other Provinces. The recent upheavals in the Tsak Pumakos Valley have had extremely frightening elements for the women giving services through the Community School and the Health Centre as well as the sisters who live at the mission Station...

Other sisters have had experiences of being assaulted by men in such manners as them grasping clothing and shaking the sisters, being held at knife point, men physically punching or pushing the sister roughly to show displeasure. In the latter half of last year, one sister had the tyre of her car shot at whilst she was returning from Hagen. The sisters' comment that they are now experiencing the helplessness that many of the women of the Highlands live with daily is a sad comment on a disturbing element of our society. That any woman should live in fear of her life while performing her ordinary duties is a situation that cannot be approved by any social structure...

The sisters are anxious to be of service to the people of this country but with the decline in Law and Order they are becoming unsure of where energies can effectively be utilised without undue risk of physical or psychological harm.

We ask you to give some consideration to this concern of ours; not only for the sake of the Women Religious of the Catholic Church but even more so for the sake of the women of the Nation. We firmly believe that the violence that we are personally experiencing is an extension of the domestic violence that is prevalent in the country.

Signed: Sister Rita Hassett RSM, Chairperson, on behalf of:

Sisters Henrilena, Miriam, Anne, Wigbertia SSpS

Sisters Gabrielle, Sue, Helen, Jenny RSM

Sisters Thomasina, Margaret CSN

Sisters Christofilda, Ursula, Augusta, Aloisia RS

Catholic Women Religious of Enga Province²⁰

A time of discernment

However, the situation deteriorated further, as services were forced to close, and sisters were wakened each morning by the sound of sub-machine gunfire. Although it was generally thought that the mission personnel and property would be protected, there was no guarantee of this happening. The sisters, under the guidance of Sister Christa Murphy SSpS, gathered together in 1989 for discernment about whether to stay or go. As a consequence, Sister Gabrielle Flood, who had returned to PNG to be of assistance in the community, decided to leave and return to Australia. Sister Helen Law decided to stay until December 1990 when she was due for home leave, while others chose to remain indefinitely. Helen had been on the staff of the Catechist Training Centre for four years and had guided Helen Kiponge and Elizabeth Pepom through their postulancy at Pumakos.

Tribal fighting and destruction of Pumakos

Meanwhile, clan enmities continued to flare up and find expression in lawlessness and tribal fighting. The situation in Enga was declared a state of emergency, the carrying of arms was prohibited, and anyone found carrying weapons, even a garden bush knife, was immediately arrested, and the burden of proving innocence placed upon the suspect. However, the fighting in the Tsak Valley intensified as more and more clans were drawn into the web of conflict. The sisters at Pumakos appealed to the province and the police, particularly when they and their female staff were attacked and assaulted while carrying out health patrols. Although the police presented a show of force, there was no follow-up, and it seemed that the problem was beyond their power to control.

A time of war²¹

The land on which Pumakos station stood was close to the border of two related but rival clans. When the Pumakos clan that had held out for so long against fighting, was drawn into the conflict, the mission station inevitably offered a tempting passage for surprise attacks on the enemy. The mission authorities and the sisters, particularly Sister Clare, questioned the warring clan leaders and the people about their intentions towards the mission. In response, they insisted that they wished no harm to come to the missionaries; nor did there seem to be any religious antagonism of Lutherans against Catholics. Two clans were appointed to protect the sisters, first the Keps and then the Kwias. The Kwias, in particular, acting as bodyguards, risked their lives in defence of the sisters in the long months of fighting to come.

Caught in between this network of tribal fighting, Sister Jennifer explains the sisters' relationship with the people:

We personally were neutral, favouring neither side, and both clans at that stage were caring for us and our safety. For example, if we were out on the road in the course of ministry they would always tell us to wait until fighting ceased and the danger was over. Another example of this care was that sometimes we would have been out and fighting would start again only when we got back safely. It was as if they knew we were out and wanted us to get back before they started again.²²

Sister Helen Pili bravely taught alongside the teachers, but in the tense situation, the parents whose children had to pass through enemy territory, eventually kept them at home and the school was forced to close. Sisters Sue (until February 1991) and Clare (until 1991) continued health care at the hospital and health patrols until these were abandoned because the safety and lives of the nurses were threatened. Sister Jennifer continued until the forced closure of the Catechist Training Centre when the catechists returned to their home villages.

A time to stay

With intermittent fighting going on around them in the form of bullets and flying arrows, and warriors advancing across the property, it was a terrifying time for the sisters. Yet, they refused the request of the anxious and concerned Bishop for them to leave the station as they wanted to continue their ministry and stand by the women and children and the majority of ordinary people badly affected by the fighting. Sister Jennifer reports on their reasons:

After careful consideration and prayer we sisters, Jenny, Clare and Helen Pili, decided that if we served the people in good times we should also support them in their bad times. We decided to stay on and carry on with the health services and the CTC. The tense situation strengthened our sense of community and mission. We always made sure that there was no one left alone on the station and spent a lot of time together to keep our spirits up. We could never have survived this ordeal without each other's support. We were also supported by others who were thinking of us, like Tess's Easter parcel or Father Laurence's letter telling us he appreciated our staying. He reinforced our own convictions that, having been with the people in good times, we should not run away in the hard times.

Sometimes the bullets would be flying over our house and one afternoon the only place where we could sit was the laundry, because the kitchen was in the crossfire and it would be dangerous to stay there. So here we were, Helen Pili, Leonie (Sister St Therese) and myself, sitting on the mats listening to music and doing a bit of craft work – they were making bilums and I was making some kind of a mat out of long stitch using wool. While we were sitting there a group of young women came to see us and brought us some kaukau because the lapun mamas were worried about us. Other afternoons the old women would wait for the fighting to finish for the day and they would come around the back way through the bush and bring us little bundles of kumul, potatoes or a little something from their garden, because at that stage there was no one actually living round the station – we had no close neighbours. They would sit down with us and talk to us and when the time came they would say: "We had better go now. We want to get home before dark". I felt loved by those old ladies for their thoughtfulness and concern for our safety.²³

A time to leave

Inevitably, the sisters reached the conclusion that they would have to go, and in fact, if they did, perhaps the fighting would cease. Once the decision was made to evacuate, the Bishop was notified and he came to talk to the people. The Enga religious, for example, Sister Mona Marie SND, Sister Bernadette SSStT and Father Laurence, were also present to give their support to the Bishop. This was when the people protested that they wanted the sisters to stay. The Bishop gave them some criteria. They had to be at peace, and take responsibility for the protection of the property, which they said they would do.

Then some men stood up to speak, like John Pulip the councillor and leader of the Yabatani Pausa, and his father, Iki. They asked the people what they were doing. They had given the land and supported the mission and now all this trouble had come up. After this, Iki walked away sadly and his son said he died of a broken heart a few weeks later. The mission personnel left on the fortieth anniversary of the arrival of Father Donkers to establish the mission (April 25, 1991).

Sister Jennifer reflects on subsequent events:

Once the mission personnel left the station, there was no further fighting for a time. We had hoped this would be the result and that there would be a breathing space for the people to consider their actions and the results it had brought about – e.g. the closure

of all health services, the two schools, Lutheran and Catholic, and the Catechist Training Centre, the destruction of homes, stores, gardens and the massive loss of life. However, turmoil was stirred up again due to political rivalry among the clans in a provincial government by-election, and from April to August 1991 there was no effort by the government to work to bring peace to the people. We had hoped by our action in leaving the station to shock the people into action and working for peace. To some extent this was successful as the fighting ceased at the time. However, it seemed no government body was interested in restoring law and order. The impression was to leave them alone to destroy themselves.²⁴

A time of loss

On Friday September 27, 1991, the priests' house, store, garages and some parts of the Catechist Training Centre were destroyed by fire. The same night, the sisters' convent was burnt down. Within a week, the church was destroyed. Some time later, some of the classrooms were burnt down. Almost everything was destroyed – the rest of the Catechist Centre, staff houses, school buildings and the health centre. There were only seven buildings left standing, mainly school buildings and staff houses. The following night the remaining buildings were burnt down. The entire station of ninety buildings was burnt to the ground!

A time to mourn

Can words on paper convey the destruction and loss? Who can describe the horror of the all-consuming fires rising to the skies or the finality of charred metal, darkened concrete foundations and scarred patches of earth left where once sturdy buildings had stood? It was all gone – the place of community worship, a primary school for hundreds of children, a large health centre open to all in the area, and the combined training centre for catechists and their families in the Wabag, Simbu and Goroka Dioceses – and the sisters' home for 26 years, with all their belongings and professional and ministry records!

A time to heal

For the entire period, whether during peace or war, Father Cassie Niezgoda SVD, who was parish priest of neighbouring Pompabus and caring for Maramuni and Pumakos, continued to come for Mass and to give pastoral care to the people of the area. This meant he had to pass through the fighting area wherever he went, oftentimes having to lie down in the *baret* (ditch) waiting for the fighting to cease so he could go on. He was often afraid and, looking down over the valley from the hilltops, felt he could not go on. But he was encouraged by the community at Londe, urging him to go on and supporting him with their prayers. When there was looting from the station at Pumakos, he encouraged the outstation communities to come and collect the material so that they could build small chapels where they could pray and he could offer Mass with them.

A time to gather (stones) together

The Bishop had met with clan leaders at crucial times during the crisis, trying to influence them to cease from tribal fighting with all its loss of life, homes and food gardens. With the

total destruction of the mission station and education, health and pastoral services at Pumakos, he insisted that it was now up to the clan leaders to bring about peace and begin the task of restoration. This they finally set about doing, and in the years ahead some school and health buildings were constructed and services resumed. Within ten years a large wooden framework had been erected, which was intentionally larger than the one that had burnt down. It was in a clearing near this imposing but incomplete structure, that a special Mass of celebration took place.²⁵

A time for embracing

Bishop Hermann Raich, his vicar, Father Arnold Orowae, and many mission personnel came to rejoice with the people in this sign of peace and regeneration. Sisters of Mercy were prominent among them, including the early pioneers, Sisters Clare Gilchrist, Helen McDonell, Margaret Shakeshaft and Jennifer Bailey, and the first Engan Sister of Mercy, Veronica Lokalyo. After the previous tragedy, the small clusters of buildings seemed like green shoots sprouting from the ashes.

The Mass was celebrated outdoors with the altar near the priests' former presbytery. Church representatives, many of them women, stood in line with blue, red and white uniform clothing and decoration, to form an enclosure. When questioned about this, they explained the symbolism: "A church has walls, but as ours as yet, has none; we have made the wall ourselves."

The pioneer sisters renewed many acquaintances. Here were mutual friends who had stood by one another in different circumstances of life and death over the years! Many were the spontaneous Engan hugs of love and joy! There were tears too, in the realisation that age had replaced the youth of past years, and with oceans separating them now, there was little chance of meeting one another again in this life. Also present were former Sisters of Mercy from Enga. Helen Pili and Elizabeth Pepom, who had received their teaching qualifications with the sisters, were teaching at nearby primary schools. Helen Kiponge, who had received her qualifications as a registered nurse with the sisters, now saw herself as carrying on the work of Sister Clare in the Pumakos area. It was a time to remember absent friends and co-workers, such as the Sisters of St Therese who had been with the Mercy Sisters in community and ministry at Pumakos and later at Wanepap – Sisters Laurentia, Leonie, Heriberta, Bernadette, Petra and Maria Goretti.

After the communal worship in the liturgical celebration, in true Engan style, lavish hospitality and exuberance were expressed through sharing the *mumu*²⁶ feast, speeches of welcome, presenting of gifts and joyous clan *singsings*.²⁷

During the proceedings, a young woman, Scholastica Koiam, approached her fellow Engan, Sister Veronica Lokalyo, presenting her with a letter for the sisters. Scholastica had written this on behalf of a group of widows who were staying in a house nearby to protect the convent land.

Dear Mercy Sisters,

We are taking care of your convent land here, and the others won't build anything there. We built a house to protect your convent. The foundation is there. It will always be yours. All the widows stay in the house they've built.

*Signed: Scholastica Koiam, Katrina Nandiam, Scholastika Sokon, Anna Lombo, Maria Mandai, Marata Kata, Elizabeth Alocos, Lainya Erem, Teresia Tunala, Patricia, Maria Wapilam.*²⁸

Refuge and new start at Wanepap

The sisters eventually sought refuge at Wanepap. Despite their devastation, Clare and Jennifer began again. Clare started with a small bush clinic and Jennifer completed the catechist training program. For a time in 1993, Jennifer was the only Sister of Mercy left in



Sisters Clare and Claudia at Wanepap.

Enga as she travelled throughout the diocese doing supervisory work with the catechists in their parishes. The following year, Jennifer was asked by the Bishop to commence a Bible School at Wanepap to introduce the new Bible apostolate at grass roots level. Clare returned and the two sisters were joined by young PNG sisters who played a part in the Bible sessions, sharing and retreats. First Sister Elizabeth Pepom, then Sister Schola Fakiwi, followed by Sister Catherine Jambet, a qualified pastoral worker, took part in this ministry.

In turn, Sister Claudia, Sister Sebastina Yangan and Sister Sophie Samiak came to assist Clare in the clinic and in the bush patrols. As younger women, they recognised their role in gaining experience to take over responsibilities in health care. Sister Maryanne Kolkia joined

the community as a postulant and later as a Junior Professed sister, teaching in the primary school. These years were a time of preparation for the PNG sisters to take full responsibility as a Mercy community. This was a phase of transition.

The people of Enga publicly express their faith

Two heart-lifting events of the people celebrating their faith in pilgrimage up and down the mountains and valleys of Enga occurred during these years. The first was that of the *Bokis Kontrak*²⁹ in 1996. The Bible, encased in a transparent box, as a replica of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, was carried on poles from parish to parish, accompanied by large crowds from the surrounding villages. Sister Sophie Samiak joined as a health carer on the journey. Jennifer, who along with some of the sisters, had helped the people to prepare for this spiritual event by giving Bible retreats beforehand, was delightfully surprised that her own well-thumbed Bible was the one chosen to be in the *Bokis Kontrak*.³⁰ The second event was the celebration of 50 years of the Church in Enga in 1997. The people decided to have a pilgrimage following the same track that Fathers Willie Ross and Gerry Bus had followed. When the pilgrims arrived at Pompabus, on their way to Pina and Sangurap, to finish at Sari, the original centre in 1947, they rejoiced to find Father Gerry Bus there. They considered him the founding father of the

Catholic Church in Enga and showed him great respect and appreciation for returning from Holland to be with them for this momentous occasion.

Crossings: Australian and PNG sisters

Clare and Jennifer left at the end of 1996 and 1997, respectively, to return to Australia, leaving the PNG sisters to carry on the Mercy mission. This marked a truly significant crossing of community and ministry in the history of the Sisters of Mercy. In 1998, there were three PNG Sisters left at Wanepap – Sisters Sophie, Catherine and Maryanne.

A time to leave Enga

After several years at Wanepap, circumstances forced the Sisters of Mercy to leave Enga. The location of the clinic at Wanepap had not been supported in the province, and the clinic was eventually forced to close due to acute shortage of medical supplies. Although there was some possibility of starting a health clinic further out at Kepelam, this did not eventuate. Sister Sophie, who had the sad task of closing the convent at Drekikir some years earlier, now found herself once again packing up the convent belongings, removing the tabernacle and locking the front door. One door was closing for the Sisters of Mercy who had been in Enga for 35 years, and another was opening, beckoning this small band of sisters to make the winding journey along the Highlands Highway to the rural parish of Neragaima in the Simbu.

James Wia – brief history and thanks

James Wia, an ex-student from Pumakos, and Lecturer Librarian at Holy Trinity Teachers College, prepared a speech for the fifty years' celebration of the Sisters of Mercy, entitled 'Brief History and Thanks'. James' grandfather was one of the leaders of the Tsak Valley clans.

On behalf of the people of Enga, especially the people of Pumakos and Wanepap, I am honoured to say a word of thanks to all Mercy Sisters, who in one way or another have touched the hearts of Papua New Guineans during the times when no governments would have come to such places.

It was in 1965 when I was in Standard Three that four Sisters of Mercy landed at Pumakos. They were namely, the late Mother Francis, Sister de Paul (Clare), Sister Mary Augustine (Helen), and Sister Mary Imelda (Margaret). Then other sisters who joined them later that I can remember were Sister Jennifer, Sister Magdalen, Sister RoseMary, Sister Maureen and Sister Sue. Your coming was not a surprise to us because the priest who planned the convent, Father Bekerom, told us that some women who cover their head with laplaps would come and live in this house. Father Bekerom collected the timber and put up all the buildings with iron roofs at Pumakos, but had a motorbike accident and had to return to Holland.

Since 1965 the teaching sisters combined to touch the hearts of about 400 or 500 pupils while Sisters Mary de Paul single handedly saved thousands of lives until Sisters Maureen, Sister Sue joined the hospital staff. One of the first graduates of Pumakos is Matthew Minok from the 1965 class. Sir Albert Kipalam who was Member of Parliament for three terms and one time acting Prime Minister of PNG for a short time, and Ben

Wia, another aspiring politician did Standard Six in 1966, while in 1967 Luke Kembol, the former Enga Administrator and his group did Standard Six, and my own group with our own local girl students did Standard Six in 1968, to name just a few. There are many more professionals and people doing all other works of life because of the Mercy Sisters. We thank you, Mercy Sisters. What you have done is history.

What I must state here is that we are fortunate to have had the Sisters of Mercy come to Enga. I take this opportunity to acknowledge God for inspiring the 'valiant sisters' to accept God's call through Bishop Bernarding. It was the redeeming work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that brought you to the last Province of Enga through rough seas, rugged mountains and deep valleys. Despite race, culture and language, you portrayed and manifested the love of God for humanity. As your Congregation name states, you showed the endless and countless mercy of God in your teaching ministry and in caring for the sick.

Your coming has had a great impact on the lives of the people of Enga in producing, shaping and moulding prominent leaders, senior public servants, and lay people who are good Christians in the local communities. Their service has contributed greatly towards what Enga is today and what it will be in the long run. Finally the people of Enga wish the Mercy Sisters a happy fiftieth anniversary and may God continue to bless your merciful ministry.

James Wia

Ex-Mercy Student, Lecturer Librarian³¹

An Update on the church at Pumakos³²

The Pumakos church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Heart is now referred to among the people of Enga as the 'penance' church. This signifies the spirit of reconciliation which has motivated each clan to unite to complete the house of God. Selected from each clan, thirty to forty men carried the vast tree lengths of timber from the mountains for the church structure. Others ground rocks from the river and caves into coarse sand for cement for the square metre flooring assigned to them. Local carpenters, using the walkabout sawmill, cut wood for the benches, and the women cooked food for the workers. This was coordinated by the Indonesian parish priest, Father Joe Mesa SVD. There have been setbacks with the breakdown of the sawmill, but the people press on to complete their Pumakos 'penance' church.

One wonders if this clan activity has revived memories of former times when the people brought timbers from the mountains to construct the first permanent buildings of the Catholic Mission. It is not hard to imagine that as the people sit around the warm fire late at night they recall the work of their grandfathers and grandmothers, so similar to what they are doing today. Do they remember the pioneer missionaries to Pumakos – Fathers Gerry Bus (1947), Jacques Donkers (1951-56), Franz Bekerom (1955-62) and Tony Krol (1962-82) – who brought the Good News to Pumakos? Do they sometimes speak of the Sisters of Mercy who responded to a missionary call to work in the Tsak Valley for twenty-six years and in other places in Enga for

thirty-five years? The testimonies articulated at the time of the first Mass at Pumakos and the fifty year Mercy Sisters' Jubilee give a strong indication of a mutual and enduring bond.

Endnotes

- ¹ Information of the sisters for this chapter is largely taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney and interviews with the sisters living in Enga while these events took place.
- ² This information was offered in an interview with Mother Philomena Ryman at North Sydney in 2002.
- ³ Mihalik, F SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*, Madang, DWU Press, 1998.
- ⁴ Krol, A. SVD, *Pumakos Parish, Diocese of Wabag, Papua New Guinea 1947-1982*. Divine Word Missionaries, PNG, 1991.
- ⁵ The account has been reconstructed from an interview and written reports.
- ⁶ Taken from interviews with Clare Gilchrist, Helen McDonnell and Margaret Shakeshaft.
- ⁷ Length of cloth covering the body and tied at the waist.
- ⁸ From an interview with Sister Margaret Shakeshaft, 2003.
- ⁹ Written by Sister Clare in a report (7/10/1967) kept in the Archives of Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ¹⁰ Elias was present to welcome the pioneer sisters at the first Eucharistic celebration of the Pumakos parish since the destruction, described later in this chapter.
- ¹¹ The account of this personal experience was offered by Brother Brian Leak FMS in 2004.
- ¹² The low retention rates of girls was a common phenomenon in the Highlands.
- ¹³ Sister Bernadette related these impressions in an impromptu conversation at Mount Hagen in May, 2005.
- ¹⁴ This report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney was written in 1974.
- ¹⁵ Excerpts of a letter maintained in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ¹⁶ Mihalik, F., SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*. Madang: DWU Press, 1998, p. 140.
- ¹⁷ Many who took part in or witnessed this carrying of the cross claimed to have been deeply moved by this experience.
- ¹⁸ Information gathered from Sister Clare Gilchrist based on her personal experiences and observations.
- ¹⁹ Taken from a copy of the impressions of the ex-PNG Sisters of Mercy kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ²⁰ Letter dated February 12, 1989 to *The Post Courier* newspaper, *The Times* newspaper, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.
- ²¹ The following account of the tribal fighting and destruction of Pumakos mission station is based on the personal experiences of Sisters Clare Gilchrist and Jennifer Bailey, and the research carried out through contact with the people by Sister Clare Gilchrist.
- ²² This was explained by Jennifer in a recorded interview some months after the event.
- ²³ *ibid.*
- ²⁴ *ibid.*
- ²⁵ October 31, 2001.
- ²⁶ Traditional cooking using hot stones in a pit dug in the bare earth to cook the pieces of meat and vegetables, wrapped in banana leaves.
- ²⁷ Traditional dancing to the beat of drums.
- ²⁸ Sister Veronica brought this letter to the National Leader, and it has since been kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy in Mount Hagen.
- ²⁹ *Bokis Kontrak* - The Ark of the Covenant which housed the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament.
- ³⁰ Krol, A., SVD & Mihalik, F., SVD, *Enga Jubili*, DWU Press, 2000.
- ³¹ Presentation prepared by James Wia as an expression of thanks to the Sisters of Mercy on the occasion of their fifty years' celebration, May, 2006.
- ³² This eye witness account of January 18, 2007 was provided by Sister Bernadette Seroo SND in June, 2007.



PUMAKOS – ENGA (1965-1991)

Founding Community

Francis Harcombe, Clare (de Paul) Gilchrist, Helen (Augustine) McDonell,
Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft.

Jennifer Bailey
Patricia Crowe
Petronia Gawi
Ann Hook
Veronica Lokalyo
Helen Pili
Margaret Shakeshaft
Frances Mary Whelan

RoseMary Baker
Jacinta Dolan
Clare Gilchrist
Angela Kaima
Helen McDonell
Pius Reid
Sue Smith

Janet Connellan
Gabrielle Flood
Francis Harcombe
Helen Law
Maureen O'Donnell
Kathleen Robertson
Maryanne Webb

Ministries

Primary Education, Supervision of Teachers, Education of Girls, Health Management and MCH,
CODE Studies, Catechist Training.

Diocesan Pastoral Centre – Par

Margaret Shakeshaft

Pina

Helen Pili

Wabag Diocesan Headquarters – Sangurap

Jennifer Bailey, Rita Hassett, Helen McDonell, Margaret Shakeshaft

Ministries

Primary School Inspector, Catholic Education Secretary, Family Life and Marriage Enrichment, CODE Studies.

Wanepap (1991-December 1998) – Enga

Claudia Apalenda
Clare Gilchrist
Elizabeth Pepom

Jennifer Bailey
Catherine Jambet
Sophie Samiak

Schola Fakiwi
Maryanne Kolkia
Sebastina Yangin

Sisters of St Therese who have lived with the Sisters of Mercy at Pumakos and/or Wanepap

Laurentia Kamat, Leonie Saki, Heriberta Kunt Kombeli,
Bernadette Waugla, Maria Goretti Gibis Tau, Petra Marau

Ministries

Catechists' Training, Bible Apostolate, Primary Teaching,
Pastoral Work.



NORTH SYDNEY MERCY SISTERS CROSS TO HOLY TRINITY TEACHERS COLLEGE, MOUNT HAGEN (1968-)

Imagine a young woman student at dusk approaching the sign: Holy Trinity Teachers College Mount Hagen. She looks up to observe the crest of the Trinity - the interwoven triangle and circles symbolising the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The pig tusks express



status and honour to the Trinity, the patron of the Archdiocese of Mount Hagen. The crossed arrows signify peace, while the *kundu* is used for celebrations and for sending messages of the Good News to the people. The surrounding wings of the eagle, a symbol of the Western Highlands Province in which the College is situated, are a reminder of divine love and protection. She breathes in to capture the essence of the college motto of vision, dedication and service.¹

In the bracing wind, the young woman pauses to survey the landscape which had once been barren tribal fighting ground. Now an attractive, flat, green area stretches before her, encircled by well-kept buildings with the shadowy mountainous background beyond. These buildings, largely funded by the German agency, Misereor, make up the campus of a large national primary teacher education institution - the only one in the Highlands. With the shrill sound of the birds in the trees, and the energetic intermittent sounds of excitement of a small group of students playing basketball nearby offering companionship, she takes the moment to feel the cool atmosphere and consider the scene. Her gaze follows the outline of the buildings. To the left of the entrance road is the cluster of houses of the chaplain and staff, including the De La Salle Brothers, who for so long have been a guiding influence and presence². Further on is the road leading down to the teachers' houses, then the Demonstration School buildings, and the rows of lecture blocks and administration centre. Directly in front at the far end of the property is the large Ross-Meere Hall, commemorating the pioneers - Father Willie Ross, the father of the Catholic Church in the Western Highlands, and Mr Peter Meere, the founder of the College, whose vision, drive and dedication saw a small diocesan establishment at Banz³ replaced by a large inter-diocesan, co-educational national institution in Mount Hagen, the administrative centre of the Western Highlands.

Her gaze then sweeps to the right, to the clear outline of the chapel, with the sloping roof reaching skywards. A solitary bell tower rises like a sentry beside it while the Brothers' library, named after the dedicated and hard-working SVD pioneer brothers, and the hill with Callan Services houses⁴ complete the section. Any moment now, the bell will toll for the evening Mass and small groups of men and women students and staff are making their way in that direction. Across a roadway rises an imposing two-story building – the former convent of the Sisters of Mercy who came from Pumakos to educate and care for the young women students. It is now used for accommodation for female students and forms part of a cluster of female dormitories named aptly after some of the former Deans of the Women. It is a reminder of the different groups of sisters who worked together in establishing the College and bringing it to the present standard – Josette McDonell RSM, Ellen Dunn RSM, Marilyn Chall OSF and Carolyn Pile FMI. In front of these buildings are beautiful, colourful garden beds, a few leafy shrubs and welcoming tall trees.

Closer now are the rows of staff houses, with the last house completing the entire circle of the campus, being the present homely dwelling of the Sisters of Mercy. Still pondering the story behind these buildings, the young woman sets off to join her friends on their way to the chapel and later the evening meal. She is lost in some sense of mystery as she makes her way across the paths of peace, recalling that this land where once battle cries had resounded, had been offered to the mission by landowners who chose peace, not war.

The planting of the Catholic Church in the Western Highlands

The young woman's reflections arouse questions of a deeper layer of history – the beginning of the Catholic Mission in the Western Highlands – questions previously addressed by Sister Helen McDonell.

The beautiful and populous Highlands of Papua New Guinea lay undiscovered by white people until 1933 when the gold-seeking Leahy brothers, Mick and Dan, reached the Wahgi Valley after walking west from Goroka. Little gold was found, but the explorers were able to announce to the world that the mountainous interior of Papua New Guinea was not sparsely populated as was generally believed, but pulsating with life and vitality. Between them, the Highlands Provinces – Eastern, Western, Southern, Simbu and Enga contain approximately 700,000 of the estimated two and a half million people of Papua New Guinea. These Highlanders are people with many regional differences in dress, language and culture, who live in an area of superbly grassed valleys, towering mountains, turbulent rivers and a refreshing climate.

It was to this promising area that American Father William Ross, informed by the Leahy brothers, walked from the Coast in 1934 to set up the first Catholic Mission in the Highlands. The flourishing Church in the Highlands today bears fitting tribute to the work of this now famous pioneer, Father Ross.⁵

Pioneers of teacher education in the Western Highlands: Peter and Leonie Meere

The pioneers of teacher education in the Highlands were husband and wife lay missionaries Peter and Leonie Meere, who first established a teachers college for the diocese at Banz⁶. The College was moved to Mount Hagen to form Holy Trinity Teachers College in the early 1960s, and within a few years, the Sisters of Mercy joined in that venture, taking a leading role in its development. At the request of Bishop Bernarding, Sisters of Mercy became involved in teacher education and administration, welfare and encouragement of female students, the administration of the large teaching practice school, and the supervision of the PNG staff. The reasons that influenced the sisters' decision to expand their ministry in the rural setting at Pumakos to teacher education at Holy Trinity Teachers College in the provincial headquarters of Mount Hagen, can be seen in the light of a report from the Diocese of Mount Hagen on the role of teacher-training in mission development.

The importance of teacher-training in mission development

The following excerpt is taken from a report of the Diocese of Mount Hagen:

It is important that the Church engage in general education at all levels at the present time in New Guinea. General education in this area must be greatly extended so that the native people as a whole can raise the level of their lives socially, economically and spiritually. The rate of social change is so rapid that the younger generation especially must have a sound education in order to enable them to adjust to the new ways of life. The people in general are making a very heavy demand for education and if the Church does not rise to meet this demand in the social field it cannot hope to command a strong spiritual following especially among the young people. The future of the Church in New Guinea depends on the supply of native priests, brothers and sisters. Such a supply in turn requires a strong educational system – primary schooling as widespread as possible and secondary schooling for all those who have sufficient ability. There can be no flowering of vocations unless educational facilities are widely available. For all these reasons missions have no choice but to engage in general education to the greatest possible extent. The consolidation and extension of the present mission primary school systems depends entirely on the provision of trained native teachers in large numbers and of high quality. The establishment of a large, well equipped and well staffed teachers college is therefore imperative to all mission work in New Guinea at present.⁷

Founding Mercy Sisters - Holy Trinity Teachers College

Holy Trinity Teachers College expanded in 1968 to become an inter-diocesan college for the Madang (Alexishafen) and Highlands provinces - Eastern Highlands (Goroka), Simbu (Kundiawa), Western Highlands (Hagen), Enga (Wabag), and Southern Highlands (Mendi).

Mother Philomena responded eagerly to Bishop Bernarding's request for sisters to staff the new teachers college. In her practical way, she selected Sister Cecily Geary from North Sydney, who was well qualified to be Deputy Principal, and Sister Margaret Shakeshaft from Pumakos to be Head Teacher of the Primary Practising School (later known as the Demonstration

School) attached to the College. As a result, Sister Margaret was replaced by new sisters to maintain the Mercy commitment to the growing school at Pumakos. Also lecturing on the staff was one of the original sisters from Goroka in 1956, Sister Marie Dagg, representing the Goroka Diocese. Thus, three Sisters of Mercy, Sisters Cecily Geary, Margaret Shakeshaft and Marie Dagg formed the founding Mercy community of Holy Trinity Teachers College.



Early staff of Holy Trinity Teachers College. (Left) Sister Marie Dagg. (Centre) Sister Cecily Geary. (Right) Leonie and Peter Meere.

The sisters' convent

The convent, which was originally intended as a central house for the Pumakos and Holy Trinity Sisters, was financed by the Bishop⁸. Mother Philomena and the sisters were seriously involved in the planning, with North Sydney sisters providing the furnishings, many of which were sent up by ship. According to a letter from Archbishop Bernarding: "The Convent of Mount Hagen became the official residence of the Sisters of Mercy, and was called 'The Convent of Mercy' in 1968. The Sisters of Mercy furnished and equipped the convent."⁹

Brother Paul was the builder, but as he had other assignments, it was some years before the building was completed, furniture installed and amenities provided. However, the sisters managed in the incomplete state of affairs. For example, when they first came, the front stairs were up, but were almost as steep as a leaning ladder! Improvements were made in stages.

First, the father of Sister Mary Joseph Wightly, who was eventually appointed Deputy Principal reduced the gradient. Later Father Gerald Theis SVD, long-serving Chairman of the Board of the College, used his creative talent to design and erect a stairway with a mid-way landing to ease the climb,¹⁰ particularly for Mother Francis, who joined the sisters as Superior in their second year. This was a very important improvement as the sisters' sleeping quarters were upstairs. The sisters had learnt of the competing calls on hospitality and the privacy needed for adequate rest at Pumakos and felt that both needs could be satisfied by the sisters using upstairs for private accommodation and downstairs for meals, community prayer and hospitality.



Sisters' original Convent.

A general picture of the humble beginnings – from the sisters' records

Accounts of the sisters' involvement in teacher education come from the sisters' records: the first, a letter from Mother Philomena Ryman¹¹, the second written in 1974 by Sister Josephine (Rosarii) Byrnes, a former staff member of the College and later, Leader of the North Sydney Mercy Congregation; and the third a short reflection from Sister Cecily Geary, the pioneer Deputy Principal.

Mother Philomena's account:

A lay missionary, Mr Peter Meere and his wife Leonie had begun a Training School for local teachers in Banz. This was a small school of approximately 20 students who were male. As these two missionaries were well educated and very committed to the education of the people of PNG it was well managed and had clear aims to progress to a Teacher Training College that would be recognised and funded by the Government

at Port Moresby. The College was consequently shifted to Mount Hagen and students were drawn from the Coast as well as the Highlands. New plans were made to include women trainees as very gradually the New Guineans were recognising that little girls also needed education.

At this stage Archbishop Bernarding requested the Sisters of Mercy to be responsible for the care of the women students and if possible supply some input into the staff of the College. It was agreed that a convent be planned as a central home for our Sisters from Tsak Pumakos and Mount Hagen. Therefore it was planned as a two storey building by the sisters. The lower floor was regarded as a community venue where hospitality could be extended to the clergy, sisters and lay missionaries in Mount Hagen or passing through. In early days it was also used as a place to receive distinguished visitors from Port Moresby who were interested in this new and a very interesting expansion of education in the Highlands. The building of a home for the women students went on at the same time as the convent and closely adjoined the convent.

As had been our custom at Tsak Pumakos, all furniture for the convent was sent from Sydney and many of the maintenance charges were met in order to assist in providing a 'home' atmosphere, not only for our own sisters, but other congregations of men and women, either arriving from the out-stations in town for supplies, or travelling to and from Sydney. As the College progressed we also offered hospitality to other religious sisters who were on the staff.

Sister Josephine Byrnes' report:

As education grew in Papua New Guinea so did the need for teachers, so that in 1968 when Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen, became an inter-diocesan college to cater for the Western, Eastern and Southern Highlands and the Madang dioceses, there was a further request from Bishop Bernarding that some of our sisters be involved in the work of training future primary school teachers. Under the principalship of Peter Meere, the College had been extended to include women undergraduates. We were also asked to take over the care of the women students. 10,000 teachers were needed for the 300,000 school age children in these dioceses so that all children could go to school and begin to be educated. At present all the schools in these areas have only about 2,000 teachers – 8,000 short of the required number. The Sisters of Mercy have responded to this call.¹²

Sister Cecily recalled her impressions of the early days when the buildings were being constructed around them. Without complaint, the students used to go down to the river to wash, and the sisters and students carried buckets of water for drinking and household use.¹³

The Demonstration School

A large school on the campus beyond the teachers college lecture blocks was used for training purposes. This was the Holy Trinity Demonstration School. It was the principal school for conducting demonstration lessons and practice teaching sessions, setting the standard for other Hagen schools used for the established 'block' teaching practice. Sister Margaret Shakeshaft

carried out the duties of head teacher from the beginning in 1968 to the localisation of the school in 1973. During this time the National System of Education was introduced (1971), and localisation policies and 'relevant curriculum' were initiated. When Margaret went to the Philippines to attend the East Asian Pastoral Institute Program in Theological Studies, Sister Kathleen (Matthew) Robertson stepped up as head teacher, and Sister Jennifer Bailey moved from Pumakos to teach Grade Six. The sisters took seriously their combined roles of teaching, religious education, relevance of the curriculum, as well as their contribution to teacher education and promoting the government's localisation policies.

Some early impressions and experiences

Sister Margaret Shakeshaft, one of the original founders of Pumakos and Mount Hagen Mercy missions, records the beginnings in teacher education, including the development of the Demonstration School:

On January 28, 1968, the first Mercy community commenced living at Kingalrui, the bare stretch of ground outlined with a few basic buildings that was to become in time the impressive Holy Trinity Teachers College campus, Mount Hagen. The dynamic principal, Peter Meere, formed the hub of planning and organising for the fast developing and changing life on the campus. His wife, Leonie, was an innovative English Lecturer. Dedicated lay missionaries from PALMS joined the staff – Anne Fileman (Ginge) who had been teaching in the Demonstration School the previous year and new arrivals Christine Ford (Peter's administrative secretary), and Helen Pretty (typist and office worker). We were soon supported by three new staff members from the Philippines, Paz and Melchior Marquez and Sally Alzaga.

It was indeed a time of change, growth and development for the College – women were being accepted for training for the first time and the very large building project funded by Misereor had already commenced.¹⁴ Father Basil Aerni SVD from Madang, had been appointed Chaplain and Project Manager for the vast project taking place.

The convent that we moved into was financed by the Hagen Diocese and was still being built. Brother Paul SVD and Marian Hill Brothers, Hubert and John, were doing the building, helped by their team of loyal, hard-working men whom they had trained. Nearby at the mission headquarters in Hagen, the 'father of the Western Highlands', Father William Ross, was parish priest of Rebiamul.

All around us things were new and unfinished. We kept on with our planning, adapting and working hard in our challenging, different roles. Gratefully, we accepted each addition to the shell that was our convent home, as an important milestone. One particular cause for celebration was the opening of the Chapel where Mass was celebrated by Bishop George Bernarding on May 18, 1968.

Members of the local community welcomed us, and they, plus the broader diocesan and town community, helped us in various ways. The college students and the students of the Demonstration School were anxious to learn. Mostly they were well motivated and appreciated the help they were getting.

When handing over the leadership of the Demonstration School to me, Peter Meere introduced me to a band of committee men, who were leaders from each line or clan from the local community. They formed a pivotal point for communication with the parents and grass roots people of the area in the tumultuous years in preparation for Self-Government and Independence.

Working with this group made many things possible. As head teacher, I had a meeting with them in Tok Pisin each week after school. These dedicated men were very active in helping the children gain all they could from the education being offered. Indeed, these men were my right arm in the running of the school. They were my advisers in cultural matters, and created an essential two-way parent-school network during changing times. I remember with great respect, gratitude and affection the original members of the school committee: Oni, Kunai, Kunjil, Ropra, Togual, Kerua, Oga, Rubiga and Pombra. In addition, two great clan leaders who constantly supported the College and the school were Peter Yaga and Sir Wamp Wan.¹⁵ I remember also with gratitude the great Western Highlands teachers and three excellent male teachers who were appointed from Madang, specifically to help raise the standard of this important teacher education practice school.

The school comes to the people

By the time Sister Kathleen Robertson was acting head teacher of the Demonstration School, policies promoting localisation and 'relevant curriculum' were in place. The National System of Education was established, and serious efforts were being made on the part of the National Department of Education to encourage the local communities to claim ownership and responsibility for the primary (re-named 'community') schools. To promote an understanding of new directions in education, Kathleen organised weekly visits of teachers and students to offer their services to the village communities¹⁶. This would take the form of assistance with coffee picking, weaving of *pilpit*¹⁷ walls, or some other community task and an opportunity to exchange ideas. Kathleen was able to continue to promote these policies in her next appointment as Inspector for the Provincial Government, working, as Sister Helen McDonell did before her, under contract with the Public Service.

Sisters of Mercy on the teachers college campus

The Sisters of Mercy of North Sydney took a major responsibility on the staff for the welfare of the young women in the teachers college. Selection of male and female staff from other Highlands dioceses was in the hands of the bishops. Bishop Cohill of Goroka recommended Sister Marie Dagg, while Bishop Firmin Schmidt nominated Ms Algra Clarke of the original Goroka group, and now a lay missionary sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy at Victoria Square, Perth, as representatives of their dioceses. Later, Sister Valda Finlay from Simbu was recommended by Bishop Cohill of the Goroka Diocese. Sister Helen McDonell performed a vital role of in-service of head teachers of the Highlands areas. Other North Sydney sisters on the staff were Margaret Shakeshaft, Rosarii Byrnes, Helena Scoins and Josette McDonell.

After the unification of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG in 1981, recruits came from different Mercy congregations from Australia and within PNG. These were Ellen Dunn (Melbourne),

Pauline Masters (Perth), Carmel Carroll (Yarapos, Kondiu, Bathurst), Agnes Murphy (Aiyura, Melbourne), Helen White (St Benedict's Teachers College, Brisbane) and Carmel Martin (Brisbane).

North Sydney sisters on the staff of the Demonstration School were Margaret Shakeshaft, Francis Harcombe, Patricia (Anthony Mary) Crowe, Kathleen (Matthew) Robertson and Jennifer (Agnes Mary) Bailey. In later years, Sisters of Mercy carrying on these traditions as members of staff, were the national sisters – Petronia Gawi and Mariska Kua.

Tending the sick in the clinic, Sister Gaudiose van der Linden SSpS – fondly known as Sister Gaudi – was renowned for her tireless and cheerful nursing attention to staff and students

Principals of Holy Trinity Teachers College

The sisters worked under various expatriate and national principals. After Peter Meere, these included Jim Smyth, Father Paul McVinney SVD, Paul Hukahu (former seminarian from St John's Kairiru), Brother Edward Becker De La Salle, Brother Peter Gilfedder De La Salle, Joseph Waka and Kubod Laien.

The running of a large college depends upon effective support staff – not only in the academic areas but also in administration and welfare. The principals were assisted by the deputy principals, such as Sisters Cecily Geary, Joseph Wightley and Agnes Murphy, but also by the staff in their responsible roles with the students and in the domestic management of the campus. The practice of community service – the care and maintenance of the grounds – was one that the sisters and brothers engaged in, as well as carrying out roles of welfare of students. Sister Marea Roberts performed an important role as assistant registrar in 1974.

Sisters have worked in collaboration with Divine Word chaplains like Fathers Basil Aerni, Peter Sylvester, Garry Roche and Don Grant. The role of Father Gerald Theis SVD, as Chair of the Board and Vicar General, was very significant.

Sisters moving 'in and out' during localisation

Sisters of Mercy at Holy Trinity Teachers College, like those at St Benedict's Kaindi, were involved as department heads in the academic fields of Education Studies, Mathematics and Sciences, Language, Religious Education, Social Science and Expressive Arts. As the number of national staff increased, the sisters became increasingly involved in localisation policies and implementation. This involved a rigorous process in which national staff would test their capability at a particular promotional level, supported by the sisters who had previously held the position and had assisted in their training. As an example, Sister Joseph Wightley assisted Arnold Koim from Mount Hagen in his role as 'associate deputy'¹⁸. Sometimes the person concerned received a promotion at another teacher education institution. On rare occasions, circumstances indicated that the person was not yet ready to assume responsibility at a higher level. The sisters sometimes found themselves moving in and out of positions of responsibility; they had localisation of the institution at heart and keenly felt the professional 'ups and downs' of people with whom they had worked closely over a number of years.

Teacher education personnel of the National Department of Education, including Pamela Quartermaine¹⁹, frequented the College in their advisory capacity. An influential visitor to the

campus was Sister Joan O'Toole RSM²⁰ in her role as Senior Staff Development Officer in the staff section of the National Education Department. Joan did so much to keep the localisation process effective throughout every department in the College. Sisters particularly active in this process were Sisters Margaret Shakeshaft, Josephine Byrnes, Valda Finlay, Helena Scoins, Ellen Dunn, Pauline Masters, Carmel Carroll, Helen White and Carmel Martin.

Tertiary education of women



Sister Josette McDonnell and students.

When the sisters started at Holy Trinity Teachers College, the young women students were in a small minority. Although student numbers were increasing year by year, it took more than two decades for the proportion of the female enrolment to rise from one-quarter, to one-third, and eventually in the early 1990s, to one-half of the student enrolment. The years from 1985 to 1995 were proclaimed worldwide as the

Decade of Women and due to some international influences, as well as pressure from the Sisters of Mercy on the staff, policies and practices of equal opportunity for women students were introduced and maintained. This was a significant advance for women in the teaching force, particularly in the case of Highlands women, and also for the staffing of Catholic schools in the Catholic dioceses of the Highlands.

Sisters of Mercy who achieved their qualifications in primary teaching at the College were Mariska Kua, Theresia Tina, Maryanne Kolkia, Mary Nambakwen and Betty Angalapai.

Raising standards

As Heads of Departments, the sisters were very involved in the writing of curriculum guides and materials in preparation for the introduction of the three-year Diploma in Education which was to replace the two-year Certificate in Education. This was a national initiative to upgrade the standard of primary teacher education throughout the country.

Missionary support from Australia

Essential to the missionary dreams and outcomes of the sisters was the continuous support of the Church, including the Church in Australia. This support came in the form of new recruits of sisters and Australian lay missionaries from PALMS²¹ and also through the financial and material contributions of those making sacrifices on behalf of the missions at home. As well as the school mission groups, the sisters themselves, friends, family, the St Vincent de Paul, and others who may have only heard of the sisters' needs in the mission, have continued their valuable support. This has been the pattern from the beginning of the sisters' appointment to mission to the present. While it started out as a North Sydney venture, the support grew as sisters from other dioceses joined the Holy Trinity community, and benefactors from these other dioceses rallied to support the mission of the Sisters of Mercy financially, materially and spiritually.

Callan Services for disabled persons and elementary education

Operating from St Benedict's Teachers College Campus, Brother Graeme Leach established a training branch for Callan Services for Disabled Persons at Holy Trinity Teachers College – the Callan Special Education Resource Centre. Courses on the principles and practice of identifying, referring and teaching children with learning and physical disabilities were introduced into the teacher education program. Among the sisters involved in the implementation and supervision of this program were Sisters Helen White and Angeline Singiat. Project management and financial records were undertaken by Sister Irene Callanan in Wewak.

Elementary education was also an initiative of Callan Services at the Mount Hagen and St Benedict's campuses. Sister Emma Awehi was the first Sister of Mercy to begin training in early childhood development.

Holy Trinity Teachers College Chapel and student involvement

The college chapel held a significant place in the life of staff and students. Daily Eucharistic celebrations were led by the various chaplains with lively participation from students and inspiring liturgical music. This tradition was first established by Sister Marie Dagg, followed by Sister Helena Scoins and the Welsh musician Brother Ambrose Gwynne De La Salle. Spectacular and moving ceremonies were enhanced by the students, guided by their Religious Education lecturers. Among these were Sister Josephine Byrnes RSM, Sister Raphaela SSpS, Sister Carmel Martin RSM and Sister Catherine SSpS. The SVD chaplains who lived on campus were available for counselling and spiritual guidance.

The convent – a centre for hospitality

The original large convent was a regional house of the Sisters of Mercy. The sisters from Enga came on occasion for supplies, for health reasons, or to travel to and from Hagen airport. Sisters from the Simbu and Goroka found it a place of welcome. However, it was never a place for the Mercy sisters alone. Members of other religious orders as students or serving on the staff, particularly the Franciscans from the Mendi Diocese, also made it their home. The convent became a transit house for the Franciscans and others en route to the Southern

Highlands. As well as being the centre of the Western Highlands Province, Mount Hagen was at the crossroads of several Provinces – Goroka-Simbu (also Madang and Lae), Enga and Southern Highlands. The sisters made sure it was a very welcoming place, not only for those on the campus, but for travellers of the religious orders who came to do their weekly banking and shopping at the main commercial centre, apart from the Eastern Highlands centre at Goroka over 100 kilometres to the east.

It soon became evident that with so many visitors, the sisters needed domestic help. In the second year, Mother Francis Harcombe, the generous and gracious founder of the North Sydney group to Pumakos, was appointed for ministry in music and hospitality. Suitable young women were recruited, who could be trained in domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, and offering hospitality. Within a short time, a real bond of loyalty and friendship developed as the young women worked closely with the sisters and carried out their duties capably and reliably. Visitors soon came to appreciate the welcome offered by these cheerful, caring and dedicated young women.

Later, Sister Monica Raper was chosen for the very busy ministry of hospitality. In addition, Monica conducted religious education beyond the campus in the Administration Schools in the town – the Mount Hagen, Tarengau and International Primary Schools, and the Hagen Park High School. Early sisters involved in weekly religious education ministries were Margaret Shakeshaft and Francis Harcombe.

Significant events

In 1977, the sisters of Holy Trinity hosted the Union of Women Religious Congress. Findings of a nationwide research study into future directions in ministry of religious women in the post-independence era, which had been carried out by Sister Mary Petrosky FMM, were presented. In addition, Sister Teresa Flaherty, who had analysed the responses recommending sisters' involvement in pastoral work, presented the findings.²²

In 1979, a combined Mercy gathering was held here, at which the Highlands sisters at Pumakos and Mount Hagen, Goroka and Simbu, interspersed with a few originally from Wewak, agreed to form one Highlands group in order to promote Mercy unity in the country. For a few years in the second half of the 1980s, part of the sisters' convent was used as a temporary administration centre under the leadership of Sisters Helen O'Brien and Joan MacGinley. In 1989, this was transferred to McAuley House.

On the occasion of Pope John Paul II's visit to PNG and the Eucharistic celebration at the large central park lands in May 1984, the sisters at Holy Trinity offered accommodation to the Highlands sisters or arranged for them to be billeted. Sister Josette McDonnell recalls that the Sisters of Mercy distributed thousands of hosts in sacred vessels to the 75,000 who were expected to come from all over the Highlands for the Mass. They also contributed in other ways to the occasion. However, these actions, along with their well-known mission involvement in the diocese seemed to be overlooked when it came to a matter of protocol. The Sisters of Mercy had replaced the wearing of the full religious habit, including coif and veil, with a simple dress and religious Mercy emblem.

*Among those selected to receive communion from the Pope were the leaders of the religious orders, women and men, currently working in the Highlands. There was one notable exception to this privilege – our National Leader, Sister Helen O'Brien. Helen was denied the privilege because the Sisters of Mercy were not wearing veils as we had dropped the custom some years before.*²³

Later that year, the sisters held their second National Assembly and the Notre Dame Sisters at Kumdi offered to provide food and accommodation in the boarding school. This act of kindness was initiated by Sisters Marissa Connors, Helen Rita and Rose Bernard, early pioneers of the Notre Dame Sisters in the Highlands, and readily endorsed by their congregation. The Notre Dame Sisters had close links with the North Sydney sisters, particularly as Mother Philomena had offered hospitality to their sisters in Sydney on route to Toledo, Ohio for their home leave. As former Matron of the Mater Hospital she was in a good position to secure the services of the Mater Hospital for missionaries when medical services were required.

The Convent Study Centre for young women interested in religious life

When the North Sydney Mercy Sisters had been working in the Highlands for about 15 years, some young women expressed their interest in religious life as Sisters of Mercy. Up to this time, the sisters had directed any such potential candidates to the national religious congregations. When these congregations were firmly established, Mother Philomena approached Archbishop Bernarding, seeking his consent to accept young women expressing an interest in the Mercy way of religious life. With his positive response, she duly appointed Sister Helen McDonell as Vocations Director. Equipped with a four-wheel drive vehicle and travel budget, Helen visited interested young women in their home villages. She soon found that there was an urgent need to raise their educational qualifications to secondary level. With the willing consent of the De La Salle Principal, promising young women selected by Helen were accommodated in the women's dormitory and received tuition for their correspondence lessons²⁴ (College of Distance Education – CODE). The young women also acquired some basic housekeeping and hospitality skills by managing the sisters' dining room and offering a welcome hot coffee to the staff or missionaries on their weekly supply visits to the commercial centre of Mount Hagen.

Helen's constant companion in the early 1980s was a young teenager, Christine Kamalin, who learnt English and cooking from the sisters. Christine was born on the Holy Trinity Campus where her family lived and her father did the cooking for the De La Salle Brothers. She is now married with children and her father is a groundsman at the College. Christine recalls former times:

Sometimes we stayed for a night or two in the village to talk with the young woman's family. I translated the talk – Melpa, Enga or Pisin. We went to Neragaima, Wangoi Mingende, Ulga, Lasap, Wanepap, Sari, Laiagam. It was dangerous on the roads. Helen had a four-wheel drive, a Diahatsu, and it was really dangerous going to Upper Simbu. The road was very bad. Because she was one who would talk, people would come and help us in an emergency.

A bridge broke down between Pumakos and Wapanamanda. She got a man to put two logs in line with the wheels and she drove across very slowly over the broken bridge. I

didn't want to stay in the vehicle. She was really amazing. "How did you do it, sister?" I asked her. "The Lord does it. If He wants us to do this job, then he does things for us that people wouldn't believe." So when the people fixed the bridge they called it Sister Augustine Bridge.

I used to get car sick and she would give me medicine. She knew me and I knew her. I would take my food - banana, sugarcane - and when we were stuck on the road she didn't mind sharing it with me. All the time on the roads we would pray to Our Lady - we would say a decade of the Rosary. "We don't have to go by ourselves, we go with Our Lord," Helen said. So we had to pray first and declare that the Lord drives with us and goes with us on the road.²⁵

When Helen was requested to leave the Highlands and teach at the seminary at Kairiru, Sister Mary Eamon Brennan continued with the CODE tuition at Holy Trinity. Two of the early sisters who continued secondary studies in this way were Veronica Lokalyo and Sophie Samiak.

Sisters move to smaller accommodation

During the late 1980s when the College was well established and the role of the sisters in staffing was diminishing, a decision was taken by the sisters to leave the large convent building and move to an ordinary staff house on the campus. Sisters Helen White, Valda Finlay and Veronice Lokalyo made up this community. This move allowed the large building to be used for other purposes by the administration and eventually to serve as accommodation for female students, who, with increasing numbers, had become overcrowded in the existing dormitories. The simpler accommodation allowed the sisters to identify more with the growing number of national staff. It was also more manageable for the smaller numbers in community and more suitable for the young PNG sisters acclimatising to religious life and home management. This was particularly so for the novices undergoing their community experience.

In time, national sisters took over responsibility for the religious community and the ministry widened. Prior to taking up teacher training, Sister Mariska Kua was a member of the Probation Service in Goroka and Mount Hagen, an initiative of Mrs Lynn Giddings of Goroka. This was an extension of the work of the Eastern Highlands Province Committee, as they reached out to assist first or young offenders. Mariska would visit the young men and women in their villages and assist them to settle back into normal productive life. She would stand by each one offering a listening ear and encouraging their initiatives for setting up income-generating projects like raising chickens or growing cash crops. Sister Veronica was involved in pastoral and HIV/AIDS ministry in the settlements and town area. Theresia Nakankwien was engaged in the Diocesan Team of Pastoral Animation (DTPA). Her role involved the writing and preparation of guides for catechists and pastoral workers, and induction into their use throughout the large Mount Hagen Diocese. Theresia took a prominent role in the National Assembly of the Church in PNG. Sister Emma Awehi began her ministry with early childhood education through the Callan Services at Holy Trinity. Sister Sophie Samiak was appointed to the Health Clinic at Rebihamul, managed by the Holy Spirit Sisters. Sister Angeline Singiat, lecturer in Language Studies (2000-2006), was the first national Mercy sister on the staff, succeeding the expatriate Sisters of Mercy who had served there before her.

A De La Salle perspective

De La Salle Brother William Shaw, former staff member (1985-1993), reflects on the central role the religious congregations played in social interaction, promoting a spirit of friendship and cohesion on the campus.

After the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) left the administration and maintenance of Holy Trinity campus, the De La Salle brothers took on a leadership role at the request of the College Agency (Bishops of the Highlands), not only through the Principalship, and as Heads of Department (HODs) and lecturers, but also as mentors to junior national staff, and counsellors to students. The first community of these brothers were Edward Becker, Ambrose Gwynne and Patrick McInerney.

The De La Salle and Mercy communities, as well as those of Sisters of Notre Dame, Franciscan Sisters, Patrician Brothers, Holy Spirit Sisters established a sense of community amongst the religious, including the various chaplains who officiated at HTTC. The Sisters of Mercy, who had been there from the beginning, worked beside the Divine Word Missionaries, and other religious communities. They had a keen interest in, and took on an equal responsibility for all that concerned the welfare and overall good of the College. This involvement enhanced social cohesion.²⁶

Sisters of Mercy in PNG: Aida Jujumo's thoughts

A lecturer at Holy Trinity Teachers College in 2006, Aida Jujumo, originally from Buka in Bougainville, begins her story as a student there in 1990, and recounts her close association with various Sisters of Mercy who have been significant in her professional life.

I first came to know about the work of the Sisters of Mercy when I was training to be lecturer at Holy Trinity Teachers College in 1990. Sister Helen White was my supervisor in the Language Strand. Being new to the college setting, Sister Helen became my role model. She assisted me in planning, programming and writing courses. I saw in Sister Helen leadership qualities that I could apply. I was fortunate to have Sister Helen in the Language Strand.

In the early 1990s, I worked with Sister Carmel Carroll. She was not only my boss in the Language Strand but she was like a mother to me. We both shared the work and often stepped in where there was work to be done. Life was never boring when I was with Sister Carmel. I also worked with the other Sisters of Mercy who taught in other strands and departments. These were Sisters Agnes Murphy, Valda Finlay, and Carmel Martin. I found the sisters' commitment to work ongoing. They worked until the work was completed. Sister Valda was not only good in teaching arts, but she was good in sewing too. Something I admired her for – she sewed her own clothes! When not at work I always felt at home whenever I was invited for a cup of tea with the sisters.

Sister Joan O'Toole from the Staff Development Office was in charge of the program and she would come around and see each one of us. When I came back in 1992 and was on the staff, I applied for further training and further study. Joan was still there, and though my first application did not get accepted, she continued to seek for sponsorship the following year, then again, and finally I got sponsorship in 1996 for Master of Edu-

cation at Queensland University of Technology.

After this I worked at Curriculum Development Division for one year in Language Curriculum, and part time lecturing and tutoring CODE in Buka on Bougainville until 2001 when I returned to Holy Trinity. I have been Subject Co-ordinator for Language and co-ordinating Diploma in Education (Primary) since then.

For some reasons, I feel part of the Sisters of Mercy even after sisters have come and gone. After the other sisters have left, I have been blessed with Sister Angie Singiat. We share a lot in common. This is in regard to work and of course being a woman.

As a whole, I am impressed with the work of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG. For example, the work that has been done with girls attending Yarapos Secondary school. We have seen ex-Yarapos students attending Holy Trinity Teachers College and their leadership roles are outstanding. I congratulate the Sisters of Mercy for continuing to empower the young women in PNG.²⁷



Father Gerry Theis SVD, Sisters Magdalida SND, Josette RSM, Helen RSM and de Porres SND at Holy Trinity Teachers College.

OTHER MERCY SISTERS CALLED TO MOUNT HAGEN DIOCESE

While Holy Trinity and McAuley were the bases for communities working predominantly within the town boundaries, some sisters were appointed to ministries in other places in the Mount Hagen Diocese.

Rulna Health Sub-Centre – joys and sorrows mingled

When Sister Joan Adams left Aitape somewhat defeated by the heat and malaria, she felt that she had enough strength to start again in the Highlands. Responding to a request to raise the standards of a Health Sub-Centre at Rulna, Joan set out in earnest – though not quite expecting her maiden journey to the remote rural parish of Rulna to be driving a four-ton truck of building supplies on dangerous mountain roads with hair-pin bends in the wet season! On hearing of this, Archbishop Michael Meier immediately arranged for a small Suzuki which was more in keeping with what diminutive Joan could handle.

During her months there, Joan did much to improve the facilities and the security through the work of Brother Kevin Deiderich SVD. Working with national nurses, she was able, with her qualifications, expertise and determination, to raise the standards of health care at the centre and through Maternal and Child Health Clinics.

Fatima Secondary School

When the introduction of upper secondary at selected schools in the Provinces was established as a policy of the National Education Reform Committee, Fatima Provincial High School at Banz, run by the Christian Brothers, was one of the first in the country to gain approval for this new development.²⁸ Sister Petronia Gawi, having successfully completed her Diploma in Teaching (Primary) and the Bachelor of Education at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), won a position on the staff at Fatima and was appointed Dean of Women Students. Petronia taught classes from Grades 9 to 12 and carried out these duties with competence from 1995 to the end of 1998, when she left to take up duties at Divine Word University.

Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World

Having carried out a leading role in pastoral ministry in Kunjingini and Kairiru, and after leadership responsibilities for five years in Mount Hagen, Sister Joan McGinley resumed duties in ministry in the Mount Hagen Diocese. Working with Father Arnie Steffan SVD and Brother Peter van der Weil SVD, Joan was a member of the National Team for Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World.²⁹

Joan explained the significance of this:

When I returned to the Wewak Diocese in 1995, the emphasis had changed from parish renewal, as in the New Image of the Parish program and was now on diocesan renewal and a pastoral plan to effect this was just being started. The thrust had progressed from addressing scattered parishes to the whole diocese moving as a unit under the Bishop. This was made possible through an organic pastoral plan that was developed in continuity with the previous approach.

I am a member of the National Team of the Movement for a Better World here in PNG and our aim is to accompany the dioceses in their planning. At present there are seven dioceses in PNG following the renewal programs that the Movement for a Better World promotes. A very important component of diocesan renewal is the spirituality of communion. A careful re-reading of the Vatican documents revealed to the Synod of Bishops in 1985 that we are all being called to a communitarian spirituality. The program for the renewal of the diocese has as its basis this spirituality. I firmly believe that a pastoral plan without a spirituality is like a business venture.

The Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World is an intervocational group made up of lay people, religious, priests, and bishops. The bishops preside as guarantors. The group serves the renewal – conversion of the Church and society towards the universal unity desired by Christ for the salvation of the world.

Jubilee reflections of a landowner and friend

Raphael Oga, one of the landowners of Holy Trinity, who was also a former Chairman of the Demonstration School Board, and a Village Court Magistrate (1982-1998) offered his reflections on the early sisters³⁰. He recalls when the College was moved from Banz and the first buildings were built. It was hard work, but God Papa i helpim ol.³¹ He fondly remembers the names of the early sisters – Jenny, Imelda, Mother Francis, Sister Matthew.

"The sisters used to go to my house in the village and the students would help my people to pick their coffee. The old people would teach the students about cultural things. They taught us, and sat down with us. I believed in what the sisters were doing. They were a blessing and I appreciate what they have done. Now that they have gone – "ol fren igo pinis."³² Since then others have come and gone."

Reflections of the founding Archbishop of Holy Trinity Teachers College

An excerpt of a letter³³ from the sister of Archbishop George Bernarding expresses his appreciation of Mother Philomena:

The Archbishop is ever grateful to the Sisters of Mercy, and especially to you, dear Sister Philomena for your missionary caring and your strong support of the Church's mission endeavours in PNG. He prays that you be well and in constant peace.

The Archbishop's thoughts are also to be found in an early document expressing the importance of teacher education.

The youth of Papua New Guinea today, will be the leaders of this land tomorrow, and who plays a more important role in the training and development of youth, than the educator? The Church in Papua New Guinea has long recognized the great importance of the educator's role in the total development of this country and Holy Trinity Teachers College was founded years ago precisely for the purpose of training teachers imbued with sound principles of Christian living, a knowledge commensurate with their office as teachers and a zeal to impart that knowledge to their students. Today, young men and young women from many parts of Papua New Guinea receive an education here at Holy Trinity Teachers College of which they can be justly proud³⁴.

Reflections of Archbishop Michael Meier

Archbishop Michael Meier offered his reflections on the special role of religious women in teachers colleges today.

It is important to have religious in teachers colleges. The students come not only from the Highlands and coast, but from all parts of the nation. They are from different areas and have different life styles. Being here at Holy Trinity is an exercise in nation-forming. It is good also for some sisters to be living with students; it is very difficult, but I believe in it.

Generally the sisters bring a simple good witness of the religious life – not only that they have taken vows - but people can see they are living it too. The consecrated life, offering new life in Christ, demands commitment to the community and country. This is the challenge wherever religious are and the sisters at Holy Trinity are meeting this. This can be seen in their good relationship with the campus community.

Also having religious in primary school brings a certain atmosphere and challenge to the teachers in the school, particularly the older ones. They see the sisters are dedicated and this gives them strength to continue. This religious presence has quite a good influence on their behaviour. This also applies to sisters working in health care. Generally the people have great expectations and deep respect for spiritual life and religious values and are very willing to help the religious. The sisters show an openness to the underprivileged out in the village areas that are still affected by the town influences and religious communities are needed there.

The religious life will have a future here in PNG. It may require different forms of how to live it. Knowing the culture is a blessing and help to understanding people, but being so close to the culture one can also be easily caught up in everyday ramifications. So it is important for the sisters to work together and be open among themselves so they may make right judgments in their action and life with the people.³⁵

A final reflection from Archbishop Douglas Young

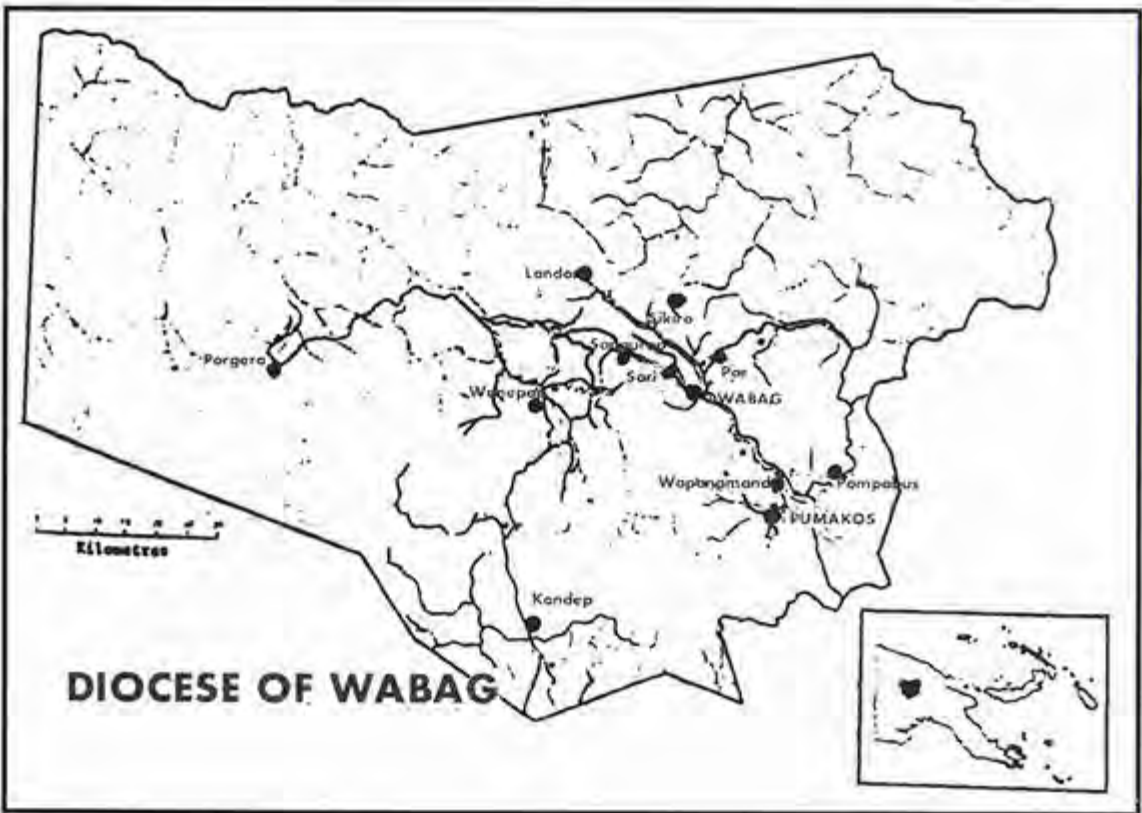
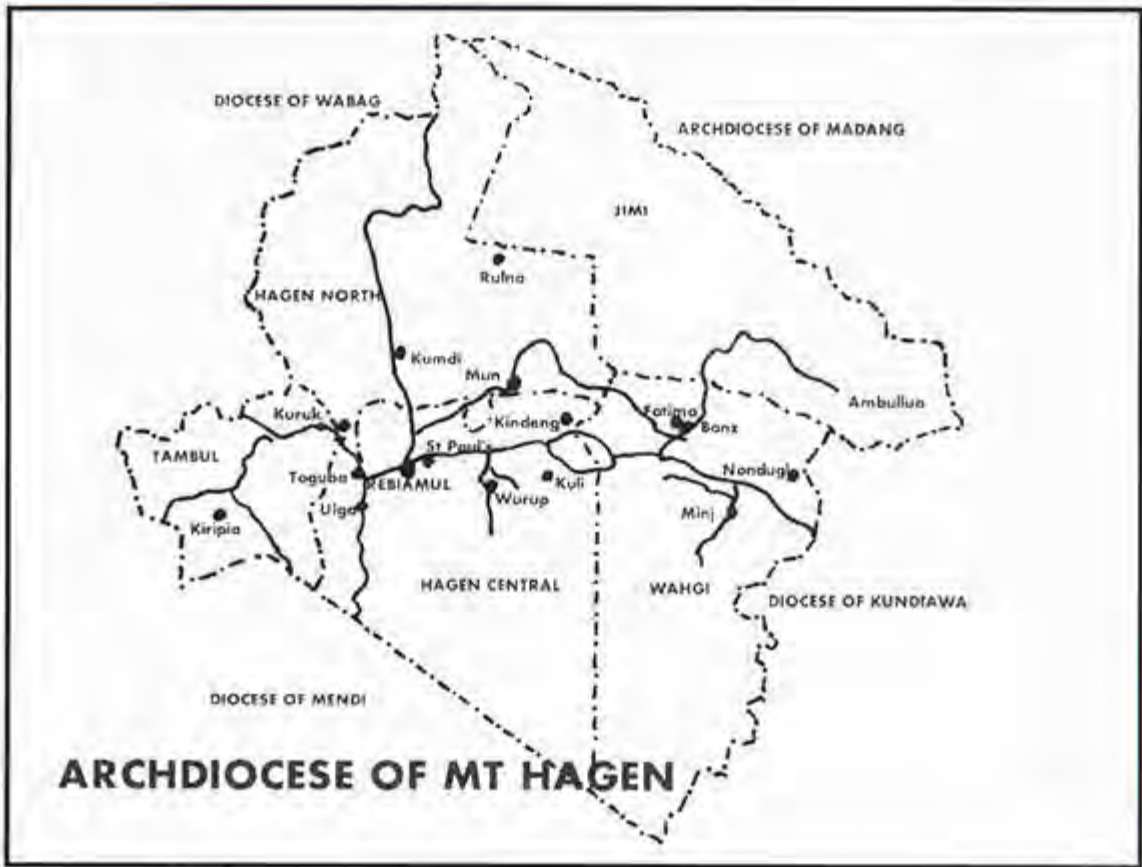
Archbishop Douglas offered a short, challenging reflection on the role of religious women in teacher education in contemporary PNG.

The original intention of Holy Trinity Teachers College was for the lay apostolate of teaching. To give the full picture of the Church there should always be religious here; but they need not be in dominant numbers, nor necessarily in positions of authority. Their presence is needed to support the lay people by offering an authentic prophetic witness, sometimes a courageous voice, on behalf of mercy and justice in these very difficult times.³⁶

Mercy Works Project in the Mount Hagen Diocese

At the request of Archbishop Douglas Young, a Mercy Works Project, similar to that in the Goroka Diocese, was introduced in Mount Hagen in 2007. It is known as the Mercy Works

PNG Project - Mount Hagen. Directed by Sister Gaye Lennon, the project is coordinated by Mrs Louise Parinjo, a former teacher³⁷, with Sister Claudia Apalenda on the staff.



Endnotes

- ¹ The information about the crest and motto is taken from the 'Holy Trinity Teachers College Philosophy', a document in the Archives of the Mount Hagen Archdiocese.
- ² Brother Ignatius Kennedy De La Salle is the current Chairperson of the Board of Governors (2007).
- ³ References are from the Archives of Mount Hagen Archdiocese.
- ⁴ The significance of this is explained in the text below.
- ⁵ Excerpts from a report for the North Sydney Chapter (1984-1985).
- ⁶ Mihalik, F., SVD. *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*, Madang: DWU Press, 1998. The teachers college started at Banz as Fatima Teachers College. The year 1957 is recognized as the founding date of Holy Trinity Teachers College.
- ⁷ This report of the Diocese of Mount Hagen, c 1967 is preserved in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ⁸ Basic items such as a stove, fridge and tables were also provided.
- ⁹ Excerpt of a letter written on behalf of Archbishop Bernarding when he retired to USA.
- ¹⁰ Father Theis had in mind, in particular, the elderly Mother Francis who joined the sisters in their second year.
- ¹¹ Taken from an early report written by Mother Philomena Ryman, June 18, 1987.
- ¹² Sister Josephine Byrnes' report was written in 1974.
- ¹³ A comment offered by Sister Cecily Geary in an interview in 2001.
- ¹⁴ This project was funded by the German Government and the people of Germany who were taxed annually generously helped development in other countries where needed.
- ¹⁵ Taken from early reports written by Margaret Shakeshaft.
- ¹⁶ A part of the curriculum known as 'community service'.
- ¹⁷ A type of bamboo, beaten flat and plaited for wall covering.
- ¹⁸ Term used for a national person in training for higher levels of responsibility.
- ¹⁹ Pamela was a long-serving member of the NDOE, and her contribution was appreciated by the sisters from the beginnings of teacher education at Kunjingini.
- ²⁰ Sister Joan O'Toole had completed her term as Deputy Principal of St Benedict's Teachers College (1985-1996).
- ²¹ The Australian Catholic Lay Missionary organisation.
- ²² Flaherty, T., RSM, "Challenge at the Crossroads: National Survey: Pastoral Work of Expatriate Sisters-in Pastoral Ministry", in *Catalyst, Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia, Melanesian Institute, Vol 7, 4, 1977*.
- ²³ These events were recalled by Sister Josette in a conversation in 2005.
- ²⁴ College of Distance Education (CODE).
- ²⁵ Taken from an interview with Christine in May, 2006.
- ²⁶ A recollection offered by email communication, April, 2007.
- ²⁷ Taken from an excerpt of a letter to the sisters written by Aida Jujuma.
- ²⁸ This was a decision of the National Educational Council (No. 68/94).
- ²⁹ Explained in a written communication, March 30, 2005.
- ³⁰ Taken from an interview with Mr. Raphael Oga at HTTC in June, 2006.
- ³¹ Translated as 'God our Father was helping us all.' i.e. 'We were doing God's work.'
- ³² 'Our old friends have gone now.'
- ³³ Dated October 9, 1987, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ³⁴ From Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ³⁵ Excerpt from a conversation, May, 2006.
- ³⁶ Excerpt from a conversation, May, 2006.
- ³⁷ A former student of Mercy College, Yarapos.



MOUNT HAGEN (1968-2006)

Founding Community

Cecily (Finton) Geary, Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft, Marie Dagg

Betty Angalapai	Claudia Apalenda	Emma Awehi
Jennifer Bailey	Mary Eamon Brennan	Josephine (Rosarii) Byrnes
Carmel Carroll	Marie Dagg	Ellen Dunn
Schola Fakiwi	Valda Finlay	Petronia Gawi
Cecily Geary	Francis Harcombe	Mariska Kua
Veronica Lokalyo	Joan MacGinley	Carmel Martin
Pauline Masters	Helen McDonell	Josette McDonell
Agnes Murphy	Theresia Nakankwien	Mary Nambakwen
Helen O'Brien	Monica Raper	Marea Roberts
Kathleen Robertson	Sophie Samiak	Helen Scoins
Margaret Shakeshaft	Angelina Singiat	Theodora Talili
Theresia Tina	Helen White	M. Joseph Wightley

Sisters from other congregations who have lived in the Mercy community at Holy Trinity Teachers College

Marilyn Chall OSF	Danielle Dietsche OD	Jane Fell SCMM
Anne Freyne FMM	Cecilia Holohan OSF	Doris Holohan OSF
Zita Pushai OLSH	Sister Tarcisia FMI	Caroline Pili FMI

Ministries

Holy Trinity Teachers College and Demonstration School, Callan Services, Elementary, Pastoral Work, HIV/AIDS.

Lay Missionary from Victoria Square, Perth

Algra Clarke

Rulna Health Sub-Centre

Joan Adams

Fatima Secondary School, Banz, and DWU Centre for Distance Education, Mount Hagen

Petronia Gawi

Community Animation Services of the Movement for a Better World, Mount Hagen

Joan McGinley



Chapter 8

THE AUSTRALIAN CONFERENCE OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY TO AITAPE – 1977

After twelve challenging years in the swamp lands of Torembe, Sister Jacinta Wiedman moved to the mountainous terrain of Ningil in the Aitape Diocese. She responded to a request from Father Tim Elliott OFM, to take charge of the Ningil health services where travel to the outstation clinics was on horseback¹. Eighteen months later Bishop Rowell OFM of Aitape made an urgent plea to the Sisters of Mercy of Australia for qualified nursing staff to maintain the Raihu hospital in his Diocese on a temporary basis. The story continues.



TEMPORARY TASK FORCE TO THE RAIHU HOSPITAL IN AITAPE DIOCESE (1977-1992)

The Australian Mercy Sisters' response to a crisis in Papua New Guinea

On November 2, 1977, three Sisters of Mercy² and one lay missionary, landed in a small plane on a stretch of jungle clearing, which was the Aitape airstrip, on the north coast between Wewak and the West Papuan border. They were young, highly trained and experienced nurses, familiar with Australian nursing conditions. Though strangers to one another, they were bonded by a mission to manage the diocesan Raihu health centre for twelve months. They had come in response to an urgent plea made just six weeks before by the Bishop of Aitape, William Rowell OFM, to maintain a 100-bed hospital and health services until a religious order could be found to carry out this work on a long-term basis. Without their immediate response, the hospital would certainly have been forced to close down.

To understand how the crisis situation was resolved, we turn to Sister Valda Ward, President of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy. The formation of the Conference was the first decisive step taken towards the unification of the Union and Federation groups in 1967 and reinforced in 1977.³ By forming the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, the leaders were able to put in motion steps to strengthen and develop the bond of unity among the sisters, which, did in fact, occur with the formation of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia some four years later in 1981. It so happened that it was during the first general meeting of the Conference, that Valda Ward received Bishop Rowell's request.

We imagine the responses of these two people to seemingly impossible challenges.⁴

Bishop Rowell ponders his request for sisters

"The Aitape Diocese is in crisis. The hospital at Raihu, which serves the whole province, is threatened to close down because the FMDM Sisters [Franciscan Sisters of the Divine Motherhood] from England who manage it have been recalled. I have been trying to get some nursing religious order to take it over, but all my appeals have been in vain. Sister Jacinta Wiedman has been with the Presentation Sisters at Ningil in the Aitape Diocese managing the health services and bush patrols there since 1976⁵ and the good work she has done prompts me to think of trying the Mercies. I hear that the leaders are meeting at an Assembly in Melbourne, and knowing that the Mercies never refuse any need, I'm going to approach them. The Sisters of Mercy are my last hope. If only they can take it on as a holding operation, so that the people of this isolated area could continue receiving medical care!"

Sister Valda Ward finds a way to assist

"I have put the request of Bishop Rowell to the National Council and they are in favour. We see it as an opportunity to respond to a desperate need and also as a sign of what we can do together that we can't do as separate units. It should strengthen our newly found Conference, with both the Union and Federation groups working together under the same umbrella. But the problem is the lack of available nurses among the sisters, and there really isn't time for long-term preparation and planning, as the FMDM Sisters leave in two months' time.

I will inform the Bishop that we have had volunteers and Melbourne (Margaret Ryan), Goulburn (Vicki Dean) and Perth (Therese Quinlivan) will each give a sister, Ballarat will provide a lay missionary nurse, Margaret Moran, and we are hoping for the services of an Australian doctor. This team will make up a task force, to keep the hospital going until the Bishop can make a more permanent arrangement."



This was the beginning of Mercy management and involvement in the health services of the Aitape Diocese – a 'holding operation' which was to last for fifteen years!

Previous history of St Mary's Hospital, Raihu

The settlement of Aitape had grown around an old German trading post,⁶ and reminders of the German administration were in the high, but precariously narrow, roadways and the solitary stone prison on the outskirts of the town! It had historic importance also because the first European SVD mission to mainland New Guinea had been established at Tumleo Island just off the coast of Aitape. Within a few years, the Divine Word mission moved to Madang and the Franciscans took over the mission area. During World War II, most of the mission stations were destroyed and as soon as the Franciscan missionaries returned afterwards, they were eager to rebuild.

Among their missionary works throughout the diocese, they established a Hansenide Colony at Raihu for the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy, which was prevalent in the area (1955-1965). From 1965, when the disease of leprosy could be controlled by medical treatment, the focus expanded to full hospital facilities, which were run by a religious nursing order from England, the Franciscan Sisters of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM). In their professional capacity, they expanded the hospital, added TB wards and sections for outpatients and casualty. They provided their own doctors and nurses, and worked towards localisation through a small on-the-job training school for nurses and aid post orderlies, which they established in 1976. In addition, bush patrols for Maternal and Child Health clinics operated from the hospital. Unfortunately, due to diminishing numbers of their sisters worldwide, the general chapter of the order decided on the withdrawal of the sisters from PNG, and despite their disappointment, the missionary sisters had no choice but to comply.

Settling in



Margaret Moran and Sisters Vicki Dean, Therese Quinlivan and Margaret Ryan.

So it was that Sisters Margaret, Vicki and Terry and lay missionary Margaret Moran, whose only experience of tropical nursing conditions was the fleeting visit to a hospital arranged with the OLSH Sisters in Port Moresby and with Sister Margaret Wilson at Mount Hagen, arrived in early November 1977. The FMDM Sisters stayed on for about two weeks to help the Mercy Sisters. The FMDM Sisters took their departure on November 21, leaving the convent and hospital stocked with all that was required, and carrying the smallest of cases with their personal belongings. The four Australian nurses were on their own!

Sister Valda Ward had accompanied the small band and stayed with them in their settling in period. Margaret Moran, who had been accommodated at the Santa Anna Mission Headquarters because of the strict rules of enclosure of the FMDMs, now came to live with the sisters. Their convent was within the hospital compound, which consisted of several buildings, fanning out from the chapel, the heart of the complex. An aerial photo taken in the mid-1980s after considerable building development, shows the fan shaped hospital compound bordered by the Raihu River with the Torricelli Mountains in the background. The hospital is approximately four kilometres from Aitape town.

Domestic and professional arrangements were soon put in place: Sister Margaret Ryan was to be Matron of the 100-bed hospital and responsible for nurse education. Sister Terry Quinlivan was named as Superior, contact person with the Bishop and the one responsible for the Maternal and Child Care clinics (MCH) and bush patrols. Sister Vicki Dean was in charge of

the men's ward, tuberculosis and leprosy sections, and assistant in the operating theatre, while Margaret Moran took charge of the children's ward, women's ward and maternity sections, and supervised the outpatients department. She also gave the obstetrics lectures in the School of Nursing.

The hospital and nursing situation

At first the contingent of four committed themselves to health care as the immediate priority. They were constant in their efforts to provide adequate treatment and were able to save the lives of many suffering from tropical illnesses, such as malaria, malnutrition, TB, deadly snake bites and accidents. Infant mortality was high and maternal deaths were common. There were some occasions where a patient hovered between life and death and the nurses, in new and strange circumstances, all rallied round supporting each other as they provided specialised nursing, surrounded anxiously by the patient's family.

Two such incidents causing great concern occurred in the first few months.²

A small child had died and the mother was in the hospital with the baby, but we needed to take them back to the village. It was late afternoon, around tea time, and we knew it would be a big shock to the village people. We decided we would all go, thinking we would all get killed together. We drove down to the village in the truck just on nightfall, expecting there would be real trouble. We heard the wailing as we approached. Suddenly the father came out and took the child from the arms of the mother and thanked us for caring for it. It was an extraordinary experience. I could have cried. It was just beautiful. It was not what we expected. We had heard of payback. We were not expecting it. It was so lovely, and so sad. We came back and we decided that was the last child we were going to lose in hospital, we were going to save all of them.

A young boy from the nearby village had been admitted with anaemia and heart failure, and seemed to have recovered, when he suddenly collapsed and died. When one of the sisters went over to offer sympathy to the family, the father struck her head and accused her of the death of his son. He swept up the child in his arms and strode out of the ward yelling threats to the sisters and hospital staff. These threats were taken seriously and a police guard was provided for the night, while the four nurses took refuge in the mission complex. In fear, and in sadness, the nurses continued their work until the danger passed. On his own initiative, Deklen, the gardener and himself a leper, stayed up all night and the following day till the sisters returned, armed with his axe guarding and ready to defend the sisters' home. Meanwhile, the distraught father, putting aside his vengeance, expressed his grief and mourned his son within the close circle of the village community.

Faced with such incidents, the sisters did not shrink in fear. Instead, they stood as one, determined to give of their best. They sought to understand the culture and the peoples' natural remedies so that they could use this knowledge in their nursing. A sharing of medical and cultural matters was a two-way process among staff and students. To get to know the different people and villages, the sisters willingly took their turn participating in the Maternal and Child Clinics bush patrols with the Health Secretary, Brother Xavier Nicholson OFM. On these occasions

they learnt much about the ordinary daily cultural practices and natural bush remedies. In addition, they adopted the practice of an annual orientation with new students who came from the far corners of the diocese, questioning them about the time-tested natural herbs and remedies used by their people. This was valuable knowledge for their nursing teaching and practice.

A wider perspective

It was not long before the sisters adjusted to the reality of a situation that went beyond the confines of the hospital complex. They saw the great need to save lives not only by the cure, but also by the prevention of illness and disease by means of health education. They devoted themselves to conducting the Nurse Aide Training Program, and the intensive rounds of Maternal and Child Care Clinics in the bush centres which could take up to three months each time. Seeing from the start the need to upgrade the indigenous male and female staff, the sisters consciously made localisation a priority among themselves and introduced in-service training programs to update and re-educate trained staff members, and to raise the standards, morale and status of the health institution. Within two years, the sisters saw the need and introduced a bridging course to upgrade enrolled nurses who had been trained in other parts of the country to general nurse level. They found the presence of these mature professional women had a great impact on the young trainees whose life experience had not gone beyond the remote Aitape Diocese. This post-graduate course was the dream of Sister Margaret Ryan, and the first of such courses for the country. This program was further developed by Sister Catherine Hefferan. In the remoteness of Aitape, and in a time before phones were common in town areas, Catherine constructed the curriculum through writing letters of consultation to the Principals of the Health Training Centres throughout the country. This relationship was continued under the principalship of Sisters Marie Britza and Catherine Harris. Many other constructive initiatives were taken by the first Matron, Margaret Ryan, such as seeking scholarships for male trainees (who tended to stay within their own areas) as well as female trainees (who were likely to marry and move outside the Diocese).

Building on the past

By extending the programs offered at St Mary's Aitape, the members of the Mercy group were able to build upon the humble foundations laid at the Raihu in 1955 by an untrained health worker, with a compassionate heart, Brother Stan (Stanislaus Rossato) OFM, and his leper *dokta bois*^a and helpers. Sister Camillus Cagney MFIC began the first maternal and child health patrols in a huge area covering the main stations and surrounding areas of Aitape, Pes, Malol, the Islands, Lemieng and Suain, in 1963. In 1966, St Mary's Hospital had been put on a more stable and professional footing with the arrival of the medical missionary sisters, the FMDMs, and had risen in status to incorporate a small training school for nurse assistants in 1976.

Part of a collaborative team

The professional and cultural adjustments required of the pioneer group and the new recruits from Australia to manage, maintain and develop the health services were enormous.

The sisters used their energies and expertise in the day-to-day running of the hospital, but also employed their professional insights by influencing decisions to increase numbers of specialist staff and improve and extend facilities. Over a prolonged period, they worked closely with the dedicated and considerate hospital administrator, Brother Xavier Nicholson OFM, and his long-serving indigenous deputy, Mr Pius Bobby, the volunteer doctors (who, after the departure of Dr Carol Brady were mostly young English doctors), and both registered local and overseas volunteer staff. Brother Garry Hill OFM was a tireless Health Extension Officer in charge of the leprosy and tuberculosis units but also carried out province-wide patrols. Father Matthew Darby OFM faithfully provided chaplaincy services.

Based mainly on the major mission stations of the diocese, there were 15 sub-health centres run by the Franciscans, Presentations and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, with MCH nurses who operated clinics at the centres and in the remote bush areas. A spirit of close co-operation developed between the managers of these centres and the administration and staff of the Raihu Hospital. This understanding was vital to get the seriously ill patients needing urgent medical attention from these places by air or mission transport to the Raihu Hospital, and from there, if necessary, to the better equipped base hospitals at Wewak or Vanimo. For some time, the Matron, Sister Julie Anne Ryan, served on the Diocesan Health Board and as Vicar for Health. Some of the sisters attended the general meetings of the Churches' Medical Council, a national body with representatives from the different denominations. This body influenced and promoted church health services, particularly in the rural areas of the country.

The sisters also worked closely with the Diocesan Health Secretary, Sister Francois Wridgway MFIC in forward planning and acquiring funding for the buildings and materials required. Sister Francois, an experienced missionary, co-ordinator of family life and Diocesan Health Secretary, has been a Franciscan missionary to PNG for fifty-four years. She recalls the collaboration she experienced and the professionalism of the sisters in executing these plans - making formal applications for building and funding, writing new job descriptions, and paving the way in preparing curricula for new courses.⁹

Within the context of the diocesan health services

The Catholic Diocese of Aitape had a contract with the PNG Government to administer and staff the Raihu Health Centre and the district health program. The Sisters of Mercy were under contract with the diocese for this purpose. The aims taken from the medical policy of the diocese, written in 1984, but long practised within the diocese, show the guidelines within which the sisters worked, and which they themselves helped to develop.

- To show the love of Christ in the healing ministry, by administering safe and efficient medical care and health education.
- To provide training and develop skills for health workers within the Diocesan Health Services.
- To provide health services within the framework of Provincial and National Health Policies.
- That Ministers of Religion be considered as members of the health team, and must therefore be given every help in ministering to the welfare of the patient.¹⁰



Map of Health Services in Aitape Diocese.

Significant people

The nursing community found themselves supported by the successive Bishops – William Rowell OFM and Brian Barnes OFM – and the Franciscan missionaries of the diocese – priests, brothers, sisters and lay workers. The orders of religious women – the Presentation Sisters, Franciscan Sisters, Poor Clare Sisters, Handmaids of the Lord, Josephite Sisters and the Mercy Sisters – formed part of the diocesan family. Like the other missionaries, the Sisters of Mercy were welcomed into the home of prominent townspeople and parishioners, Rob and Margaret Parer. In this very demanding nursing ministry, many lasting friendships were made, particularly among those – both overseas and national – who worked side-by-side bringing Christ's healing touch to relieve the suffering of others.

Difficulties faced in the ministry of nursing

The sheer work load of the pioneer group in the trying tropical conditions was almost beyond belief. They were without a medical doctor for eight months and this meant a huge responsibility of diagnosing and treating patients was placed on their shoulders. With the arrival of Dr Brady and the gentle insistence of the more experienced missionaries, the courageous pioneers began to see that they could not relieve every disease or save every life. Dr Brady found that the general condition of the people, particularly the women and children who suffered from respiratory weakness and malnutrition, meant they were very vulnerable when struck down with other illnesses. In time, the sisters set their priorities to include health education and the training of national staff, along with their regular hospital care. It was a brave commitment. Yet, while attempting to attend to the needs of others, the pioneers themselves, and the other sisters after them, like their patients, became victims of tropical illnesses, particularly dengue fever and malaria. Working with physical weakness and constant tiredness became a fact of life.

Making do in difficult circumstances

Raihu Hospital was often short of medical supplies. The sisters depended on donations so they could buy essential supplies locally. Funds were also needed to upgrade the hospital buildings and to pay wages. When there was an acute shortage of staff, Margaret Parer, who was a qualified nurse, would help at the hospital. For many years there was no hospital vehicle.

Forces of Nature

There were crises caused by the forces of nature. When the Raihu River overflowed and flooded into the hospital (which was prone to happen before new buildings were eventually built higher above the ground), the sisters were faced with having to evacuate all the patients and settle them on higher ground on the mission property. After a few days, the waters in the wards subsided and the patients were brought back when normal duties resumed. The students of St Ignatius High School, with Mr Frank Evans as headmaster, helped in the tedious and unpleasant clearing up process.

When making road journeys to and from Wewak for supplies or transporting nurses and students, many were the times the sisters faced the dangers of flooded rivers or being stranded between sudden flash flooding of the several streams which became treacherous with overnight rains in the mountains. Over 200 of these flooding creeks have actually been counted through the laborious process of navigating the crossings!¹¹ Although some of the major rivers were eventually bridged, the journeys were always fraught with difficulties, mostly by the prospect of flooding, but in later years the threat of *raskol*¹² attacks.

Funding from Vanimo Provincial Government

There were times of anxiety when the provincial government, whose headquarters were at Vanimo, delayed the renewal of the health contract or did not release the funds for salaries. Considering the urgent needs for funding from the national government for infrastructure and services like education and health, inconsistencies in the allocation of funds within the provinces were not uncommon. Circumstances also suggest that there was a degree of competition perceived by the government health services at Vanimo and the more progressively run rural hospital at Aitape. When the provincial government made allegations against the Matron, Sister Julie Anne Ryan, of misappropriation of funds, the incident was reported in the media. Julie Anne's innocence was eventually proclaimed and a full apology was later printed in one of the national newspapers.¹³ During those months of public disgrace and humiliation, Julie Anne was supported by the mission and hospital staff. The Church was unable to mount a court case because of lack of funds. At times, other sisters were victims of assault in the carrying out of their duties but the perpetrators received no penalty at all, or what may be regarded as petty sentences.

Difficulties and challenges as a Mercy foundation

One of the difficulties for the foundation was the tenuous nature of the Mercy commitment to Aitape. The arrangement of the 12 months' holding position extended to two years and there seemed no direction about the future. In terms of the hospital, there seemed to be an expectation among the people that the Mercy Sisters were there indefinitely, and in terms of the Mercy Congregation, the Conference which had authorised their mission to Aitape, had no power once the Conference session had formally closed. The situation the sisters found themselves in had no canonical basis as a foundation, (although the sisters held their original bonds, with their rights and responsibilities, to their home congregations).

A critical incident¹⁴

The flaws in the religious structure were shown through a near tragedy on Easter Sunday afternoon, barely three months after the sisters' arrival. The incident was the near drowning of one of the sisters, which occurred in seemingly idyllic ocean waters at a local swimming area called Yakoi beach (but which, unknown to the sisters, had a treacherous undertow at certain seasons of the year). Having checked out the safety of the waters with the students, the sisters then settled down to swim, with separate groups of females and males to their left in the water. One of the swimmers, Sister RoseMary Baker, who was visiting the sisters, recognised the ominous signs of the dangerous 'double bunkers' of the Sydney beaches and when Vicki, a competent swimmer, headed out for the next row of breakers, RoseMary kept a watchful eye

out for her. As soon as Vicki raised her arm in a gesture for help, which the others at first took as a friendly wave, RoseMary immediately raised the alarm, and everybody sprang into action.

Resourceful nursing students to the rescue

Margaret Ryan called out to the male students, who much to her disbelief, disappeared into the bush – but it was to find a couple of suitable coconut logs to be used as floats in the rescue operation – and they soon swam valiantly out to sea. Terry, who was not a strong swimmer, had swum further out to go to Vicki's help, only to find herself also swirling in the under-current. The first lad, Jacob, swam towards her, thinking she was the one to be rescued. RoseMary could see Terry being dumped again and again, and managed to get close enough to her to tell her that help was coming. Terry replied: "I can't go down one more time!" With that, Jacob arrived and said, "Sister, just hold on to the log," and when she gasped that she didn't have the strength, he simply said, "That's alright, I'll hold on to you."

Meanwhile, the second lad, Raymond, challenged the boisterous waves, and reached Vicki, who was by this time almost unconscious. He brought her safely to shore where Sister Francois, who happened to be at the beach with her students, tried to work on Vicki to get the water out of her lungs. Remarkably, the ambulance driver was having a few hours off work in his village nearby and was called. They laid Vicki face down on the floor of the ambulance to get the water out of her lungs. They took Vicki in the ambulance, accompanied by a very distraught Superior and friend, Sister Terry, to the airstrip. Margaret went straight back to the hospital in the truck for the doctor, Dr Carol Brady, an elderly retired doctor from Sydney and he returned with the oxygen tank. Margaret had also notified the parish priest and the mission pilot, so everything was in place with the seats rearranged for Vicki when the ambulance got to Tadjai airstrip for the medical emergency flight by the Franciscan Airways plane (Franair) to Wewak hospital. The little group of people on the airstrip made their way thoughtfully back to Raihu. At evening prayer in the hospital chapel, the nursing community, including Raymond, Jacob and other students and staff, prayed fervently for Sister Vicki's recovery.

Fortunately, the first hopeful sign of recovery happened when the waters were released from Vicki's lungs during the flight. Within hours, as soon as the danger was subsiding, Terry sought out the radio phone and called Sister Valda Ward, the president of the Conference, giving an account of the accident, and the hopeful news that Vicki had survived the crisis and was expected to make a full recovery.

Melbourne Congregation takes on responsibility for Aitape

This incident highlighted the fact that the Conference had no legal authority over the sisters. Although each sister belonged, and had rights within her own congregation, as a group the sisters did not belong to a legally-binding congregation in Australia. As a consequence, the Melbourne Congregation, with Sister Gaye Jennings as Leader, and also secretary to the Conference, took on responsibility for the foundation. The congregation also provided medicines and resources. Two Melbourne Sisters of Mercy, Brenda Grant (Director of Nursing, Mercy Private) and Helen Monkivitch (Director of Nursing, Mercy Women's Hospital), came to Aitape to assist with planning and negotiation with



Sister Gaye Jennings.

the diocese. They made a further commitment for the Melbourne Mercy hospitals to help with staffing.¹⁵ This was a very significant intervention because these recommendations were followed, providing stability and continuity for the Mercy services at Aitape.

A process of Mercy linking in PNG (1978-1981)

By the time the Sisters of Mercy of the Union (Goroka) and the Federation groups in Wewak (Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville) were first gathering together in Wewak in 1980 to explore ways of uniting in the spirit of the Conference, the Aitape task force seemed a very fragile branch of the tree. As there was no sign of any other religious order to take on the management of the Raihu Hospital, the holding operation still continued. The canonical status of the group was not defined and there was no structure for their relationship with the longer established groups of the Coast and Highlands. Under the circumstances, they were advised by the Leader of the Union Sisters, Sister Dorothy Campion, to use the current gathering as a forum to make a case for acceptance among the PNG Mercy group. The Aitape sisters told the story of their life and ministry and asked to be accepted on an equal footing with the other groups which were working towards unity. Without hesitation, and with great joy at this meeting, Aitape was officially linked to the Mercy groups as they worked towards a unifying structure.

This unification came about the following year in 1981 when the sisters elected to become the Sisters of Mercy of PNG, under the leadership of Sister Helen O'Brien. The Superiors of each region, Sister Margaret Bubb from Goroka, Sister Val Cervetto from Wewak, Sister Clare Gilchrist (followed by Sister Josette McDonell) from Hagen, and Sister Julie Anne Ryan from Aitape, formed the membership of the first leadership team. This union was a step ahead of the Australian groups, and was not ratified until the unification of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia (ISMA) later that year on December 12. The Melbourne Congregation continued its guardianship role as the 'authorising congregation' for a short time, until the fledgling PNG group devised and formalised its own internal structures of leadership.

The story continues – mixing and blending in Mercy mission

Throughout the 1980s, the health services continued to develop. Sisters Terry Gongi, Sophie Samiak and Helen Kiponge each graduated with their Diploma of Community Health Work (CHW). Margaret Roni, a young woman from Warapu in the Aitape Diocese, gained her qualifications and later joined the Sisters of Mercy in Kaindi.

The Aitape Mercy community became a home to many young PNG sisters during their formation: for community experience, nurse training, or for secondary studies by correspondence. Unlike some of the other foundations from the same congregation, the Aitape foundation, although it had a Melbourne backing, comprised sisters from different congregations. This flexibility and adaptability was seen as an asset in cross-cultural community living. Nor were the indigenous sisters an entirely homogeneous group. Each came with her distinctive and versatile language skills, cultural values and traditions. All this individuality provided a fertile ground for trying to understand each other's culture and learn to appreciate differences. This is not to say that it was a simple exercise, but to acknowledge the efforts made to achieve the Christian ideal of love and unity, a particular emphasis of the Mercy rule of Catherine McAuley.

In the attempt of the PNG group to reach beyond regional boundaries and grow in unity as a total group, other exchanges occurred. Sisters Clare Gilchrist (Pumakos) and Joan Adams (Neragaima) came from the Highlands and worked in the health services at Aitape. Both found the climate debilitating and they suffered severely from malaria, but they contributed through their vast experience in significant ways until they moved back to the Highlands. Sister Margaret Wilson, previously in Simbu and Mount Hagen, spent some time in the School of Nursing. The demands of localisation were also on the rise and the number of sisters from Australia was fast decreasing.

An important goal of localisation for the School of Nursing was to include young national religious in the training. As well as the Sisters of Mercy, they encouraged the Sisters of St Therese, Rosary Sisters and Franciscan Sisters. Later, St John of God Brothers did their training here and it was that nursing order which found themselves in the mid-1990s in the original convent building, vacated by the Sisters of Mercy some years earlier. The brothers took over the responsibility of providing a religious community presence at the hospital.



Nursing students with a patient.

The 1990s and the decision to leave Aitape

The decision for the Sisters of Mercy to leave Aitape was taken in May 1991 and communicated to the sisters by Sister Joan MacGinley, the national Leader.

*Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea,
PO Box 265,
Mount Hagen WHP,
Papua New Guinea.
13th May, 1991.*

Dear Sisters,

At our recent Council Meeting at Kaindi we took the decision by unanimous vote "That in December 1991 there will no longer be Sisters of Mercy in the Raihu Health Centre or in the Diocese of Aitape."

The decision was inevitable as our Council has been struggling to provide staff for the Raihu and the Nursing School for some time now. There are many of us who will feel a sense of loss as 1991 draws to a close.

I thank God for the dedication and generosity of the pioneer sisters, not forgetting those who followed to carry on the Work of Mercy begun at the request of the Bishop in the name of the Church in her concern for the poor, sick and under-privileged.

The Sisters of Mercy can feel a sense of achievement as Catherine Harris has localised her position as Matron. The terms of her contract states:

"Sister Catherine (or her replacement) will provide this service (Matron of Raihu Health Centre, Aitape) until a point in time that is mutually agreed upon by the National person in training and the Sisters of Mercy in consultation with the Executive of the Raihu Health Centre.

When the position of Matron is localised, Sister Catherine (or her replacement) agrees to assume the position of Deputy Matron to support the National Matron for a period of time agreed upon by the National Matron and Sister Catherine (or her replacement) in consultation with the Executive of the Raihu Health Centre."

The terms are being fulfilled this year as Lena Miroi assumed the responsibilities of Matron of the Raihu Health Centre on 6 April, 1991.

I would like you all to join in prayer and thanksgiving for all the Mercy Sisters who have ministered in Aitape. They have made a great contribution to Mercy PNG. "Glory be to Him whose power, working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to Him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21).

May the Holy Spirit shower many gifts upon us all during this week.

Your loving Sister,

Joan MacGinley RSM,

National Superior.¹⁶

Thus at the beginning of 1992, Sister Catherine Harris called upon Sister Sophie Samiak to come and help with the final packing and departure from the Sisters' house. A chapter of the extended involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in the health services of the Aitape Diocese for fifteen years thus came to an end.

The Tsunami tragedy

In 1998, the horrific force of the tsunami struck the coastal villages at Malol west of Aitape, causing death to more than 2,500 people and total destruction of their homes and livelihood. Many of the survivors experienced the grief of loss of family and loved ones, as well as their own suffering of loss of limb or other forms of physical disability. Confronted with large-scale suffering, the national and international community rose to assist. First on the scene was the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, and the management and staff at St Mary's Hospital Raihu.¹⁷

Almost overnight, their former Mercy mentor (Sister Julie Anne Ryan) and students who had completed their nursing training in Aitape – Sisters Sophie Samiak and Margaret Roni – made their way to help out, nursing in the wards in this unspeakable medical emergency. Sister Thanh Thuy Thi Nguyen, a pastoral counsellor at Yrapos, joined the trauma-counselling team of Father Tom Ritchie OFM to help young and old to recover and rebuild their lives. For a few weeks Sister Victorina Sant carried out a ministry of counselling with those who had been medically evacuated to Wewak Hospital.

Mercy missionary sisters' reflections

The following report shows how the Australian sisters involved saw their call to mission at Aitape. They reflect on their experience and understanding of the context of mission. They express the privilege they have found this to be spiritually, culturally, and in standing together with the people.

We rejoice that we have been able, through our cross-cultural ministry, to grow in appreciation of the wonder of God's creation revealed in the diversity of mutual understanding and respect across cultures. We rejoice also that we have been able to be channels of the Spirit's creativity in bringing to life and shaping the local Church in PNG. This has given us a deeper appreciation of the mystery of Christ's continuing incarnation among peoples, and has also challenged us to reflect on its meaning within our own culture and our home Church.

Of special importance in shaping our identity as Sisters of Mercy in PNG, has been the opportunity to be with people in their movement from colonial administration to independent nationhood. We recognise that we have been privileged to be able to stand together with the people of this country as they struggle to set new directions for their own future.

Being called to exercise our Mercy ministry among people in a situation of rapid, and sometimes disruptive, cultural, social and political change, has involved for us a challenge to great openness and flexibility in our response. It has meant, too, the development of an attitude of working 'with' rather than 'for' people, of 'calling forth' rather than 'handing down'.

But this response and this attitude have not developed among us as signs of life without experiences of weakness, vulnerability and passages through death, and the deeper knowledge of our own need for mercy that these bring. Our efforts to communicate the gospel cross-culturally and to work for people's integral human development have often been accompanied by experiences of conflict, misunderstanding, and a sense of frustration and even failure with regard to our well-intentioned plans and projects. But we realise that, in passing through these experiences in the spirit of the Paschal Mystery, we have been enabled to face more honestly our preconceived ideas and inevitable cultural prejudices, and to face more creatively the challenge to respond to people's real needs and aspirations, sometimes in the face of misunderstanding on the part of clergy and other Church workers.

As expatriates in PNG during the years of movement from a colonial to an independent status, we have known the pain of being identified with the agents of colonial domination. To live with this pain without a hasty response of self-justification continues to be a humbling and purifying experience. At the same time, it has challenged us to a 'letting go' of our own styles and models of leadership and to a sensitivity to Papua New Guineans' aspirations to develop their own styles and models of leadership. It has called us, too, to be able to respond with flexibility in the atmosphere of uncertainty that surrounds the future role of expatriates in PNG.¹⁸

'Localisation' stories from life experiences

Stories have been related by people in Aitape many years after the Sisters of Mercy left their nursing ministry. These stories communicate one theme – that of 'localisation' – and they offer an interesting summary of how the Sisters of Mercy went about this task, and how the PNG people involved took up the challenge.

In 2002, ten years after the Sisters of Mercy had left the diocese, Sister Regina, of the Poor Clare Sisters, graciously offered her reflections:

We remember all our Mercy Sisters with love. The Mercy spirit lives on, not only now that we have some Mercies among us again for a while (the novices with the Presentation Sisters), but especially in the hospital. Raihu is still an excellent hospital, especially by PNG standards. And yes, we have Garry (Garry Hill OFM), and good doctors - mostly Dutch nowadays, but the backbone of the place and the services provided comes from the Mercy trained staff, and it's a credit to you still.

Regina, Poor Clare.¹⁹

When the fifty years of the Raihu Hospital were celebrated in 2005, Sister Francois Wridgway, former Health Secretary and long-serving Franciscan missionary, was present. She noticed that the main emphasis and source of pride for the sisters was the theme of localisation. "The whole thing when they had the celebration was how the localisation has taken over, and the Mercies did have a big hand in that!"²⁰

Sister Francois pointed out that the work of the Sisters of Mercy was given prominent recognition in the short published history of the Raihu Hospital (1955-2005):

The Mercy Sisters worked in the hospital from 1977 until 1992. In providing first class

care for the patients and training local staff they had as their main goal the education of nurses to a standard where they could make responsible decisions and they themselves would become educators. They also placed an emphasis on in-service training. They were assisted by volunteer doctors and nurses from overseas. Much of what we have at the hospital now was in place by the time the Mercy Sisters left in 1992. The Community Health Workers School in 2006 has 60 students and 6 tutors, and is fully localised.²¹

Sister Francois also pointed out that many currently in charge of health services carried out their training with the Sisters of Mercy, e.g. Lena Miroi (Matron), Margaret Asuman (Acting Deputy Matron), Scholly Kitik (Senior Clerk). In considering the following accounts, the Sisters of Mercy acknowledge the pervading support structure and localisation endeavours offered by Sister Francois and other Franciscan health personnel. Besides those previously mentioned, Father Tim Elliott, Vicar for Health, Father Mathias Conway, Father Patrick Doram (Spiritan Father) and other priests were, at times, channels of sacramental life at the Raihu.

Lena Miroi, Matron of Raihu Hospital

The Matron offered her reflections at the Raihu Hospital in April 2002. The conversation took place at sunset just after Lena returned home from duties at the hospital to cook the evening meal for her family. Lena's impromptu comments give a good overview of the sisters' commitment and work, the process of localisation they put in place and present day realities.²²

My contact with the Sisters of Mercy. I was in contact with the Sisters of Mercy in 1981 already, when I was at school doing my Grade Ten at St Ignatius Secondary School. Sister Julie Anne Ryan sponsored me for general nursing at Vunapope for three years and after graduating I came back and joined the Diocese of Aitape under Sister Julie Anne's administration as Matron. I worked with her from 1985 until around 1988. She decided I should do some training at the School of Nursing, so I helped out with the bridging course in the School of Nursing with Sister Marie Britza and Sister Cath Harris. The bridging course was for enrolled community health nurses to become general nurses or hospital nurses. At the same time I was managing the obstetric ward and other areas.

When Julie Anne left Sister Cath Harris became the Matron and in 1990 she sent me off for my midwifery, and when I came back I was asked to take up the position of Deputy Matron. After working under her supervision, receiving assistance and training I was confident and when she left at the end of 1991 I took up the Matron's position and have held that ever since. I am registered with the Diocese of Aitape and do a lot of work for the smooth running of the hospital, and with the school, also doing a lot of district training – in-service training for the whole of Aitape-Lumi area, even the Diocese of Aitape, the Nuku area, the rural areas.

My experience of localisation. When the sisters were here they were doing really well. I didn't think that anyone was capable of taking over from them. I thought I wasn't able to, but during the training Sister Cath made sure that I wrote everything down, and made sure that I upheld the policies of the Catholic Diocese – she told me and showed me the contract – I had to read and understand the contract and ask questions about it – job descriptions, routines, policies – everything! Sister Cath went through every-

thing thoroughly with me and made sure that I made notes of all these details and the importance of keeping things on paper, so she did a good job by training me up and I grasped everything she taught me. So when she left I confidently took over.

The Sisters of Mercy felt strongly about following procedures and enforcing the Catholic policies. They used to have policies for the selection of staff, training, particularly Sister Julie Anne Ryan and Sister Cath Harris who was the last Mercy sister here, whom they used to call Mama Cath, everyone missed her so badly. Sister Julie Anne and Sister Cath stand out in my memory. Sister Julie Anne who was tough, straight, straight, yes, for standards, so was Sister Cath, and we still have the vision of maintaining those standards. The way they handed on things, the responsibilities. They were tough and straight and to the point. Up until today the standards are still the same. It was very sad for them to go. We really wanted them to stay, but they had to leave. They were happy and satisfied with everything, and everyone was coming in so they left, so we had to learn to accept it for some time, so finally we accepted it.

I think the sisters really loved working here. On the whole the Mercy Sisters were doing very well. We had Sister Sophie Samiak and Sister Terry Gongi who came for training in the school and were part of us, and very well accepted. Up until today we uphold the tradition by training brothers or sisters – in the training centre we have brothers. We have trained a good number of St John of God Brothers, a few Franciscans – it's open for any religious – we have space for them. So we still have our religious working with us. We have the St John of God Brothers in the old convent, just over there.

I see that there have been developments in several areas:

Salaries and supplies. Since the Tsunami in 1998 things have been stable. We were not getting salaries, now it's handled and being taken care of by the Churches' Medical Council and is paid straight into our account so the nurses are OK with the pay now. Only sometimes it doesn't come quickly, but it still comes. Medicines are coming too, we still have a good supply of medicine. When the sisters were here, usually there was some kind of anti-church kind of relationship with the government. This went on, and then we said: No! We are providing services for the government so they have to support us with financial assistance and training also. It has been improved. The relationship is very good and we belong together now.

Health Services. After the sisters left in 1992, the visits to the sub-health centres (Ningil, Nuku, Lumi and all these places) was not very good – with the financial situation, and other factors, but since Dr Hans has joined us last year, visits to the sub-health centres have improved, and the nurses out in the field are very grateful. A lot of MCH activities have improved, mainly because we have a lot more qualified nurses. In the sisters' times we didn't have many and we were struggling, and we have more qualified nurses now. Some have trained here – a lot of them are from Aitape and they feel responsible for their people and they stay on – and we've brought in others. Most of them, about 80% are women, so it's more like a women's hospital or something!

Raihu renovations and support. The place has changed a lot. Now in 2003 there

are five new wards – medical, medical surgical, paediatric ward, obstetrics and outpatients. A new outpatients and paediatric ward, pathology, X-ray, and medical store are still coming up and we expect them to be finished in August. When they're finished with that they're putting up a physiotherapy ward – that's because we have a lot of handicap cases from the tsunami. Since the tsunami we have a Wok Sambai,²³ and counselling department. Father Tom Ritchie OFM is in charge of that and we have an officer for that counselling. Brother Garry's new house has just been built. We have 13 new houses for the nationals, two new ablution blocks, and the morgue is a new one. A whole new admin block is in the planning. We have some money from Peter Metz, who used to own the hotel down there, he died and his will was that the money should be given to the hospital, so that money is there to put up a new administration block. The Japanese would like to help us and the Japanese government gave us some things for the lab, and they are also trying to improve the water supply. The Rotary from Australia are coming in to fix the power line, they've come to do the survey, so we're well organised.

Increase in staff. We have so many nurses, volunteer workers, nursing officers, and community health workers. There are two pathology technicians, an X-ray technician, a trainer who is a Japanese working in the laboratory, a female dental officer, and Rufina, who is in charge of the dispensary, is a woman. The whole place is covered and then we have six staff for the School of Nursing with 60 students. And we have Brother Garry, Senior HEO and a medical assistant. There's still a lot of work to be done – a lot more.

Bond with the Mercies. I remember they were hard-working sisters – I'm brought up by Mercy Sisters anyway, and I'm proud of that. I have a special joy when I have the Mercy Sisters come my way, because it was because of them that I am who I am now. So whenever I move around and travel around and I get stranded, say in Goroka or Hagen, I find Sister Mariska or somebody else and I say, "Oh I'm stranded, can you assist?" and the Sisters of Mercy come just like that. I ended up in Holy Trinity one time and I think that I have a family there in a way. So I'm proud. I feel very close to the Mercy Sisters. Tell the sisters that my husband and children are well.

Pius Bobby, long-serving Hospital Secretary

Pius Bobby tells the story of his life-long involvement with the Health Services of the Aitape Diocese.²⁴

Early days. I started at the Raihu Hospital in 1974 with the FMDM Sisters. I was doing training as a nurse aide. I gave up this training at the end of 1974 and began working as a clerk in 1975. When the FMDM Sisters left, the Mercy Sisters took over and I worked under the three Matrons, Sister Margaret Ryan, Sister Julie Anne Ryan and Sister Cath Harris. The Principals of the school were Sister Catherine Hefferan and Sister Marie Britza. Sister Vicki taught me how to drive. I was responsible for staff salaries and the Nurse Aide Training School finances, working closely with the sisters.

Localisation. Brother Xavier trained me in this work as Hospital Secretary and then I took over from him in 1985, and have been Hospital Secretary ever since. In this work I have interacted with the sisters constantly in the professional running of the hospital.

There have been many changes from the former Health Centre to what it is today – the Aitape District Hospital.

The Sisters of Mercy really began the work of localisation, which was implemented gradually until now all positions are localised. This brought on tough times until we found solutions to so many problems, for example the localisation was not all that easy – finding suitable people for the different areas and training them to take over. Sister Judy Treacy, who was doing MCH really had to work patiently to hand this over.

Many positions had to be localised, for example, Matron, Deputy Matron, Officers in Charge of the wards, Clinical Supervisors, Health Secretary, Principal of the CHW Training School, Health Extension Officer and there is at present a National Doctor. Many times as we did our visitation of the villages, Maternal and Child Health Clinics and visitation of the Health Sub-Centres, School of Nursing needs, etc, the sisters provided their own vehicle for our use because there was no other. They also got donations for a nutrition program, flywire in the wards and other much needed maintenance that the hospital could not provide because of poor finances.

My experience. Personally I gained a lot of experience in administration having worked with the Sisters of Mercy and received professional advice, and help and support in my difficult work. We worked together on making a contract between the Diocese of Aitape and the Health Department. This work was really hard and involved lawyers and other legal advisors. It had to be teamwork on all levels. Father Urban was himself a lawyer and his help was invaluable. It was very time-consuming and exhausting for all of us.

The Sisters of Mercy deserve credit for all the years and efforts they have put into the development of Raihu Hospital, which grew under their care from something quite small to what it is now – one of the country's leading hospitals. Their efforts and they themselves will always be remembered fondly.

A Bishop's fitting footnote

The Bishop of Aitape, Austen Crapp OFM, has offered a footnote to the history. In congratulating the Sisters of Mercy on their jubilee, he refers, in particular, to their work in the School of Nursing.

The Mercies came to Aitape to rescue the Raihu Hospital and develop the School of Nursing in the diocese. They established the whole venture in buildings, classrooms, programs and field work. A very good standard of health care was insisted upon and many excellent health personnel graduated from the Raihu School with a solid base of knowledge and dedication. This is still evident in the present graduates, who are many years removed from the Mercies' tuition but the charism remains. The Raihu is the only school remaining in the Momase²⁵ region of PNG and takes in students from several provinces.²⁶

An early sister's Jubilee reflections:

Sister Catherine Hefferan returned to Aitape with Sister Terry Gongi after the Jubilee celebrations in Wewak. Catherine, the former Principal, reflected on the challenges faced in establishing the health services in the early days and was amazed to see the development that had taken place.

After much dialogue with most provinces in 1981 through letter writing and meetings, as phones were not readily accessible, we commenced the bridging course in 1982. It was now possible for men and women who had graduated in community health nursing in other provinces to be selected for upgrading to General Nursing qualifications. An important advantage of the new program being offered in Aitape was that the experienced nurses from the other provinces already had general nursing experience and could act as mother figures to the young students from the West Sepik who were starting their community health training. Under normal circumstances it was an enormous struggle for young women to complete their nursing studies and the bridging course provided a wonderful incentive for the young students to take seriously the discipline of formal studies and to build confidence in their own ability.

Catherine could scarcely take in the contrast of the progress that had taken place since those times of struggle and dawning dreams. The impressive sign at the entrance 'The Raihu District Hospital, West Sepik' was a testimony to so many over the years with the vision, stamina and perseverance to make the health complex what it is today. With these thoughts of reverence and delight, the two sisters – former Principal and nursing student – stepped out arm in arm to see for themselves the changes that had taken place. They looked forward to meeting old friends and their colleagues, who were the present custodians of the health services of the Aitape Diocese.

Endnotes

- ¹ Father Tim Elliot OFM, the parish priest of Ningil, made this request because the Presentation Sisters in charge of the health services at Ningil were unable to continue at this time. When Sister Isobel fell ill at Kunjingini in 1979, Jacinta moved back to the Wewak Diocese, serving at Kungingini (1970-1982) and Drekikir (1983-1991).
- ² The background material has been gathered from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, Melbourne and Mount Hagen.
- ³ Compiled from brief interviews with sisters who were involved in these events: Valda Ward (President), Gaye Jennings (Vice President), Patricia Pak Poy (Executive Officer) and Dorothy Campion (Union Leader).
- ⁴ The thoughts of Bishop Rowell and Sister Valda Ward have been reconstructed by the author after consideration of the sequence of events in the relevant documents.
- ⁵ Because of a shortage of qualified staff, the parish priest of Ningil, Father Timothy Elliott OFM requested Sister Jacinta Wiedman to manage the health services there, living in community with the Presentation Sisters.
- ⁶ Background for these brief historical comments was provided by Sister Margaret Ryan.
- ⁷ The first of these was recalled by Sister Margaret Ryan and the second one is summarised from the Sisters of Mercy chronicle, which contains a record of events of interest.
- ⁸ Male nurses with basic education and training.
- ⁹ Conversation with Sister Frances Wridgway in Adelaide in September, 2006.
- ¹⁰ Taken from a copy kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.
- ¹¹ Reported in a written communication by Sister Francois Wridgway.
- ¹² Vandals, highway criminal gangs.

- 13 A record of these documents is kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.
- 14 Compiled by the author after conversations with Sisters Margaret Ryan, RoseMary Baker and Vicki Dean.
- 15 From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen and Melbourne.
- 16 Letter from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.
- 17 DWU Press, *Aitape: The Road to Recovery*, 2000.
- 18 This unsigned report is in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.
- 19 Written note by Sister Regina in Aitape in March, 2002.
- 20 Taken from a written communication from PNG, following a conversation in Adelaide, 2006.
- 21 Based on the *Short History of the Raihu Hospital (1955-2005)* printed by the Diocese of Aitape.
- 22 The interview, which took place in April, 2002, is reported almost in its entirety.
- 23 A counselling service where the approach is one of companioning, or standing beside the person seeking help.
- 24 This was written by Pius Bobby and sent from Aitape by post.
- 25 The region consists of East and West Sepik, Madang and Morobe Provinces.
- 26 An email communication from the Diocese of Aitape, May, 1007.

AITAPE (1976 – 1978)

Ningil (1976-1978)

Jacinta Wiedman

Raihu Health Services (1977- 1992)

Founding Community

Therese Quinlivan, Margaret Ryan, Vicki Dean, and Margaret Moran (Lay Missionary).

Joan Adams	Theresa Boyek
Marie Britza	Vicki Dean
Mary Geason	Clare Gilchrist
Theresia Gangi	Catherine Harris
Catherine Hefferan	Mary O'Connor
Mariska Kua	Theresia Nakankwien
Maureen O'Donnell	Margaret Powell
Therese Quinlivan	Julie Anne Ryan
Margaret Ryan	Sophie Samiak
Judith Treacy	Margaret Wilson

Ministries

Management of Raihu Hospital and School of Nursing,
Training of National Staff, Health Care, Clinics, MCH Patrols, Hospitality.

In the formation program with the Presentation Sisters

Assistant Formator: Theresa Boyek.

Novices: Robina Einde and Catherine Hopil.

Chapter 9

BEYOND ORIGINAL BOUNDARIES:
THE CALL OF A NATION



With the sisters' involvement in ministry in several dioceses of the Catholic Church and their influential roles with the provincial and national Departments of Education and Health, it is not surprising that Mercy Sisters spread further afield to other dioceses. Stories of these 'crossings' in Port Moresby, Madang, Rabaul, Kavieng, Daru-Kiunga, and brief encounters in Bougainville, follow.

THE SISTERS OF MERCY SPREAD TO OTHER DIOCESES

The immediate pre- and post-Independence years were very exciting and challenging ones for the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea. They were also crucial years for overseas personnel living and working in PNG as they pondered questions about their future. The wave of local autonomy sweeping the country brought with it the inevitability of change. Large cohorts of expatriate senior administrative personnel in government services, including health, education and public works, received their final pay-outs (commonly referred to as the 'golden handshake') and made their way southwards. Many coffee growers in the Highlands and cocoa and copra owners in the coastal regions left flourishing plantations behind. Volunteers in non-government organisations and churches found themselves considering their security and likely contribution in the new scheme of things. Expatriates who chose to remain in the country, as citizens or temporary residents, knew management roles were being reversed.

The Sisters of Mercy in education and health ministries, who had been doing much to train and upgrade indigenous staff, faced new and vigorous government policies of 'localisation' and training. No longer could expatriate missionaries function as managers or practitioners as they had done previously. Within this climate of change and uncertainty, some sisters chose to return to their home congregations to resume their professional ministries among their own people.

Those who stayed saw themselves as taking an active part in training young Papua New Guineans as future leaders in Church and nation. The first dramatic change was in the area of primary education with the edict that there were to be no more expatriates in any level of primary education beyond 1974. Enlightened and encouraged by the insights of the Self-Study of the Catholic Church, sisters adopted different ministries as they moved upwards, stepped sideways or with localisation accomplished, moved downwards to support the new managers in their Church or institution. With these 'crossings' at parish, diocesan and inter-diocesan levels, there grew among the sisters a consciousness of the needs for the growth of the Church within the new nation.

These developments have been explained in the case of the foundations in the dioceses of the Highlands – Goroka, Simbu, Western Highlands, Enga – and the Coast – Wewak and Aitape. The growth of a wider consciousness certainly influenced directions within the institutions of the dioceses. For example, Holy Trinity and St Benedict's Teachers Colleges soon admitted students from provinces throughout the country, not just from the neighbouring dioceses as in the original agreement. All educational institutions taught a national curriculum, and the National High Schools selected students from all provinces. The Melanesian Institute and the Liturgical Catechetical Institute in Goroka were dedicated to local and national perspectives and applications. Aitape School of Nursing developed a wider perspective as students applied and were accepted from the coastal dioceses.

ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT MORESBY

The Daughters of the Sacred Heart were a well established missionary order in the Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Rabaul areas¹. As the country was moving towards independence Mother Flavia (Catherine) O'Sullivan, a remarkable woman with a far-reaching vision, was elected their Leader. Eagerly digesting the new teachings of Vatican II, she became convinced that women religious had an important role to play in the renewal of the whole Church. With her sights fixed on the needs of the emerging nation, her vision was that expatriate and indigenous religious women of the 28 international and indigenous congregations would engage fully in the renewal of the Church. To do this they would have to be exposed to the new teachings, inspired by them, and united so they could act and speak with one voice.



Mother Flavia (Catherine) O'Sullivan OLSH.

The Vatican Council had barely concluded in 1965 and the Self-Study of the Catholic Church was not even yet on the horizon, when Mother Flavia embarked on a course to make her dream become a reality. With vigour and determination, she informed the Major Superiors of all the religious congregations, including those from Australia, of her plans. In 1967, she assembled representatives of all the religious orders in Port Moresby and the Statutes for the Union of Women Religious (which later developed into the Conference of Women Religious) were devised and approved, office bearers elected and arrangements made for the body to be legally registered. Archbishop Virgil Copas offered land on a hill near Bomana Holy Spirit Seminary and arrangements were made for the financing of the building of the Xavier Institute of Missiology PNG and Solomon Islands, the first of its kind in the southern hemisphere. The major funding was to come from the religious orders involved, gifts from donors, and after 1973, support from the German organisations Missio and Misereor. John Wild was the architect and the building was completed with the official opening on October 11, 1970.

While the story of this small, but mighty and courageous woman rightly belongs to the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, and is theirs to tell, there is no doubt that her influence extend-

ed to all congregations of religious women in PNG, and in the context of this text, the Sisters of Mercy. As a large group of missionaries in the Church in the Wewak, Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Enga and Mount Hagen areas, the Sisters of Mercy were keen to support Mother Flavia's initiatives, as were their Major Superiors from Australia. Mother Philomena Ryman from North Sydney, in particular, played a key consultative role because of her expertise on the executive of Religious Women in Australia (representing Papua New Guinea and the islands of Oceania) and as a delegate for meetings of the Union of the International Superiors General in Rome.² She also had a wealth of experience in management to offer, including her first-hand involvement as Major Superior of the North Sydney Sisters of Mercy in Enga and Mount Hagen.



Sister Christine Watt and Melanesian sisters at Xavier Institute.

Xavier Institute of Missiology

The Sisters of Mercy were soon to have a more direct role in the administration and development of Xavier Institute, starting from the second year of its operation. Sister Christine Watt,

first Superior of Yarapos, and fresh from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), where she was imbued with the teachings of Vatican II, was asked to assist Mother Flavia, who was elected as the first Director. Christine was overjoyed at the opportunity to work on this visionary venture with Mother Flavia, and enthusiastically threw herself into the task. She soon found, however, that with Mother Flavia's deteriorating health, she was called to take on more and more of the administrative responsibility.

Sister Christine returned a second time to Xavier Institute as co-ordinator. She stayed on to help in the preparation to celebrate the occasion of the Silver Jubilee in 1995. Her recollections reveal the beginning and the vast influence of Xavier on religious women and men over this period.

I had the unique privilege of working with Mother Flavia and sharing in her vision for formation of religious sisters in PNG. When I first saw the proposed site it consisted of a conical hill top, and some eighteen months later it had been levelled and Xavier Institute was being constructed there. Classes began before the building was completed, and, since the complex was only a walking distance from the Holy Spirit Seminary, some of the first lecturers were from the seminary.

When Xavier Institute was proposed in 1969, twenty-eight religious institutes responded to Mother Flavia's invitation to meet in Port Moresby. That included the indigenous diocesan congregations of PNG. Within a few years this number had grown to forty-four. In the years that followed over 700 women from PNG, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Kiribati gathered at Xavier "to study and re-energise themselves for their pastoral duties". The institute was opened to clergy and male religious students from 1989.

Bishop Copas gave the seminary and ourselves a mandate to try and indigenize liturgy. So I tried to encourage the sisters to try and do things that meant something to them in their culture, but staying within the framework of the liturgical constitution. I always thought that was important - to know the rules and then be able to flesh them out. Having experienced that with the various nationalities at EAPI in Manila I found it quite exciting to be able to do it with the indigenous sisters. I did encourage some of the sisters to write hymns and Masses in their own local musical idiom, which was good too.

The aims for the religious renewal and on-going formation for both national and expatriate sisters have been kept in focus. Courses have been offered for spiritual renewal, formation personnel, vowed life, final vows, leadership, spiritual and academic studies. Decisions about these courses, and joint responsibility for them, has increasingly been in the hands of the indigenous sisters themselves. Responsibility for orientation courses for new missionaries, which were originally included in Mother Flavia's vision, was taken over by the Melanesian Institute which opened in Goroka in 1972.³

Sister Christine Watt's response to move from Yarapos in the Wewak Diocese to Xavier Institute in the Port Moresby Diocese was the first crossing beyond diocesan boundaries where the Mercy Sisters were established. In the years since then other Sisters of Mercy, with considerable mission experience of PNG, and imbued with an appreciation of its cultural richness, responded to calls to assist in the administration of Xavier. Sister Cheryl Camp was asked by

the President of the Conference of Major Superiors, Sister Cecily Daot AD, to take the position of Directress of Xavier Institute in 1981. She carried out this responsibility from 1982 to the end of 1984. She was joined in 1983 by Sister Helen White from St Benedict's Teaching Training College in Wewak, who took on the roles of Bursar of Xavier and Lecturer at Holy Spirit Seminary. During that time, as well as the usual formation courses, a special leadership course for Superiors was introduced, dealing with topics such as leadership qualities and skills, conducting community meetings, communication skills, the exercise of authority, psychological development, religious life, and the place of religious life in the Church and world.



Sisters Cheryl Camp (L) and Helen White (R) with Melanesian sisters at Xavier Institute.

Helen recalls that while it was a challenge managing in two working environments, she appreciated the collaboration of the seminary staff with those of Xavier Institute. Aided by the *wantok*⁴ system, there was a vibrant atmosphere created by the seminarians and religious participants at Xavier. At times, Helen sought spiritual solace, heartily welcomed by the Carmelite Sisters, for days of quiet retreat.

Sister Julie Anne Ryan, with long and valuable years of experience at Aitape and Kunjigini, was the next Sister of Mercy to accept the request to take on the role of Directress of Xavier, a role which involved planning programs, selecting personnel to conduct and facilitate courses, and in some cases, offering her own specialisations. She recalls some impressions of developments:

During my four years there from 1995 to 1989 the leaders of the religious congregations throughout PNG were very concerned about the formation and welfare of the religious and courses concentrated on personal development of sisters, priests and brothers. The very first vowed life course consisted of 16, half of them men and half women, and it was a real learning process for men and women of different cultures to adapt to working together. Those years were also a time of localisation in the sense of the PNG congregations taking more responsibility for the continuation and development of Xavier.

Xavier was part of the Bomana community. The priests used to come up and say Mass for us, and a lot of the Xavier brothers and sisters knew many of the seminarians. Before the house for the male participants was acquired, so they could form their own community together, there was regular contact with their base communities – Diocesan, Sacred Heart Brothers, Marists, SVD, Dominican.⁵

The sisters had an influential role extending beyond the parameters of Xavier Institute. The Mercy Sisters on the staff brought with them a wide and varied experience of mission, and/or developed their knowledge through personally visiting the sisters and familiarising themselves with their lives in community and ministry in their home dioceses. Moreover, the Union, which evolved into the Conference of Women Religious, operated in all the dioceses and was held together by the executive in Port Moresby. A number of Sisters of Mercy held administrative positions in the dioceses, and for a time, Sister Helen O'Brien was National President of the Union of Women Religious (1985). In this role, and also as Executive Secretary of the Conference of Women Religious and Federation of Religious from 1990 to 1997, Helen had a particular influence in articulating the rights of indigenous women and giving them a 'voice'.⁶ Sister Marie Murphy also performed a valuable role as Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors for six years from 1983 to 1989. Both these sisters had a tremendous influence on raising the status of religious women in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

The young national Mercy Sisters attended courses at Xavier related to vowed life, formation, pastoral ministry and spiritual renewal. They brought their expression of the Mercy charism and were enriched and strengthened in their lives and ministry by the spiritual traditions of the various religious congregations.

Sisters of Mercy contributed to, and shared in, the growth and vitality offered by the young religious. They also shared in the times of difficulty – times of drought, nearby threatening fires, attacks by criminal gangs on the property – and on the routine road trips to Moresby for supplies, mail and to meet or farewell their many visitors and resource persons. Life in the nation's capital was fraught with the same dangers their sisters were facing in the provincial areas. Like them, they depended on prayer for their safety and security but they were also women of resourcefulness and courage, in securing the building with window bars and a fence enclosure.

It was not only the Sisters of Mercy stationed in Port Moresby who have been assisted at various times by the men and women religious of the diocese. The sisters passing through Moresby to other destinations have often been accommodated, sometimes at short notice, by so many, namely the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, the Brigidine Sisters, Sisters of Xavier Institute, and in former times, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. The resident SVDs, particularly Father Mike Hughes, Brother Fridolin and Brother Anthony Hollenstein, have shown remarkable patience and perseverance in acquiring work permits and visas. The sisters could never have

managed air travel arrangements in PNG without the amazing service offered by Brother John McGeachie and his reliable staff of Dove Travel, Boroko.

Sister Maria Koiae's reflections on Xavier Institute

A former Leader of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart and Co-ordinator of the Xavier Institute programs, Sister Maria Koiae, reflects on the outcomes of the participation of the PNG religious at Xavier:

As leaders of our congregations, we can now serve the Church as we have the knowledge and skills to pass on to the young religious, and not only the young ones, but the formators. We have learnt what it means to be a presence, and we are happy to pass it on to others in building the Church, and this country. After the teaching jobs that were helpful to our congregation it is a second apostolate for us in this phase of life. We need to keep this place going.

The experience of the expatriates has been very useful for us, giving us their knowledge and skills and mission experience. We are now moving into a new status of localisation, of giving something back to Xavier Institute. It is a tribute to them that we can now do this.

Xavier has been very valuable to the Church. It is the only Institute for both women and men. Because it's in the country we are learning what it is to be a Melanesian religious. It is too expensive to go overseas. We are coming here from individual congregations, but living together enriches us, to be a bit broader and to think in the mind of the Church and to live and serve together as one body in serving our country.

Mother Flavia's vision was to raise the status of women through education. She wanted this Institute set up to raise the status of women religious through courses in missiology and ongoing formation training. To accomplish her vision she had to bring all women religious in PNG together as a Union, with branches set up in dioceses according to regions. In this way the women religious would be a united body and have a voice which could be heard by the bishops. They would have a voice in the Church. Before that religious women, because of their low status, did not have a voice in the Church and in the country.

To give an example: The Mercy Sisters wrote the letter to the bishops about the need for agreement on the rights of religious women and right relationships in the Church. As a consequence we now have a comprehensive document to guide us. We are now working on the Protocol.⁷

Sister Martha Lonai's reflections on Sister Helen O'Brien's role

From her experience on the executive of the Conference of Women Religious, Sister Martha Lonai, congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Therese (1986-1989, 1990-1992, 2004-2007), is in a good position to comment on the national role played by Sister Helen O'Brien.

Sister Helen O'Brien enabled national religious to take the lead in facilitating the National Conferences. She saw to the fencing in of Xavier Institute and security of the house,

rooms and classrooms, when 'raskols'⁸ caused so much trouble. Helen has been facilitator to various congregational Chapters, not only the Sisters of St. Therese. Helen has been more like a mother who is concerned for and cares for the religious group and each individual, with the ability to listen to them and meet their needs. We have been following the Guidelines on Right Relationships that she did so much to formulate, to address issues of misconduct and abuse. They have been approved by Rome, and each diocese has a committee set up.

To the National Department of Education (NDOE)

Other sisters made crossings to the capital. Sister Joan O'Toole (1985-1996) who had completed her term as Deputy Principal of St Benedict's Teachers College, was appointed Senior Staff Development Officer in the staff section of the National Education Department.⁹ Within the official plan to localise teacher education within ten years, Joan's particular role was to help implement the five-year Education II Project, a fundamental part of which was the improvement of primary teacher training. Joan's expertise involved the organisation, implementation and evaluation of the recruitment and training of new associate lecturers, short-term overseas training to provide experience in Australian teacher training institutions, and postgraduate overseas study.

In this mammoth task, Joan worked in Port Moresby and did extensive field work in the nine teachers colleges - two run by the Administration (PNG Institute of Education, formerly Port Moresby In-service College and Madang Teachers College), three by the Catholic Church - Kabaleo Rabaul, St Benedict's Wewak, Holy Trinity Mount Hagen, and three of religious denominations Gaulim (United Church) Rabaul, Balob (Lutheran) Lae, and Dauli (Evangelical Alliance) Tari.

Many national staff members were withdrawn during the associate training period to participate in professional development opportunities. In their absence, principals of the Catholic colleges were urged to retain or recruit overseas staff, particularly religious sisters, who would help to safeguard the religious identity of the colleges. Joan's contribution during this transition stage was highly valued. During her many years in the largely male establishment of the National Department of Education, Joan provided a professional role model for women aspiring to more active roles in policy and management at the upper levels of education. She was a mentor to young PNG sisters, including Sisters of Mercy, in terms of their professional development and further educational opportunities, particularly those undertaking tertiary studies.

After the successful completion of the project, Joan experienced some degree of uncertainty as the contract terms were reduced to a year-by-year basis, and the last months of each year were a time of not knowing whether or not a renewal of contract in staff development would be offered.

Thus, the five years extended to eleven years, by which time Joan not only saw the widespread localisation effected in the teachers colleges but also in regard to her own position as principal staff development officer. With these vital tasks fulfilled, Joan returned to Australia in 1996.

Sister Moira Cleary, who succeeded Joan as Deputy of St Benedict's Teachers College (1984-1989), was employed in 1990 with the Curriculum Unit of the National Department of Education to write a Religious Education curriculum for use in the teachers colleges and schools. Moira was on the leadership team at the time, and though in poor health, continued for as long as she could with both tasks until, with the onset of a terminal illness, she bravely, resolutely and quietly returned to Goulburn, Australia, where she died among her sisters within a few short months in 1991.

To the House of Prayer, Nazareth – Port Moresby

In February 1980, Sister Winifred McManus from Kondiu responded to an invitation from the Handmaids of the Lord in Nazareth to be part of the core community of the House of Prayer which had begun in 1976 to serve the Port Moresby Diocese. As the demand for this facility grew throughout the country, the members of the basic or 'core' community, as well as the praying guests, came from all dioceses and from almost all the religious congregations of men and women in the country.

The rapid growth of the House of Prayer and the urgent need for committed, prayerful members of the core community was explained in a circular letter seeking volunteers.

People from all ages, all races, all ways of life and all faiths have come, from every part of Papua New Guinea and even from abroad, to seek the Lord in Prayer. The pressure of life and work is often such that one becomes immersed in it, and needs to be in a quiet place to find the solitude and silence necessary to find God.

Also, leaders who have heavy responsibilities in the political, economic or educational spheres come to ask the Lord to give them an "understanding heart to lead their people" (1Kg 3:9). Priests and religious engaged in active apostolate come to find there the contemplative dimension which they need in their life spent at the service of the People of God.

Those who come to the House of Prayer to seek God, to listen to Him and discover the marvels of His Love, to find peace and unity in His service or understand better the meaning of their life need a community of love and prayer where they can receive encouragement and guidance. This community can only exist if priests, religious and lay people commit themselves to it for a definite time.

With Father Philip Kurtz SJ as Director, Winifred was part of the core community from February 1980 until July 1982¹¹. Winifred carried out her role with enthusiasm, constancy, wisdom and graciousness. Upon leaving the House of Prayer, Win continued some spiritual direction and assisted some of the Handmaids of the Lord Sisters preparing for final profession, until she was unfortunately forced to return to Melbourne with heart trouble. Win recalls her time at the House of Prayer as a most precious experience through which she gained much, and "appreciated the wonderful support of the great bunch of Mercies in PNG!"

To Port Moresby General Hospital

While Sister Theresia Gongi was serving temporarily as a clinic nurse at Marianville Girl's High School a position of nurse at Port Moresby General Hospital was advertised. Terry wished to apply, but was reluctant to fill in the application forms. However, a friend, with a more realistic appraisal of Terry's competence, went ahead and lodged the application on her

behalf! The result was that Terry was surprised to receive an acceptance letter to begin work in mid December 1998! After some years in the nursing ministry at Port Moresby General Hospital in outpatients, intensive care and post-operative care sections, Terry offers her reflections:

I see there are a few nurses who are just there to do the job and get paid. That helped me to look more into why I am here and who I am here for. I reflected on it – and God led me here to do His work and look after His people. This is Jesus lying here, and I work for Him. I never applied for the job, and He led me here – to really do the job for Him... I'm happy where I am – with all these lovely people I am working with – these lay people – so they are my sisters.¹²

Thus, Sisters of Mercy have been consistently involved in ministry in the Archdiocese of Port Moresby since 1971.



Sisters Joan O'Toole and Petronia Gawi
in Port Moresby.

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MADANG

Pastoral ministry training and Renewal with the Sisters of St Therese

In the early years the Goroka Sisters of Mercy went to Alexishafen periodically for retreats, workshops and holidays, travelling via Divine Word Airways. It was not until 1976, however, that any Goroka sisters were involved in full-time ministry. Up to that time, Sister RoseMary Baker, a former teacher who had since qualified in pastoral ministry,¹³ was engaged in full-time pastoral ministry with women at village level in the Highlands. She had recently conducted a Christian Living Program for the wives of pastoral workers at Maiwara near Alexishafen. Archbishop Noser saw her as ideal to assist the Sisters of St Therese, whose particular charism was related to the family apostolate, in this new field of parish pastoral ministry. Consequently, RoseMary spent two years doing this work. The first year was in Madang, and the second year was in the parish on Karkar Island, where two of the St Therese Sisters, Gabriella and Christine, participated in a specially devised guided training program in village pastoral catechetics. Towards the end of their training, the Sisters of St Therese elected Sister Gabriella as their Superior General, an event which perhaps highlighted the successful completion of the program!



Sisters of St. Therese with their founder, Bishop Noser SVD.

Furthermore, a vital Mercy link had been made with the Sisters of St Therese. When their co-founder, Archbishop Noser died (April 15, 1981), the sisters found themselves in a vacuum as they were left struggling to find and establish their own identity as a religious congregation. Mercy Sisters had previously assisted the Rosary Sisters – founded by Archbishop Arkfeld – with their renewal and growth towards autonomy. Now as the newly appointed Archbishop of Madang, Archbishop Arkfeld envisioned a similar collaboration between the two groups. A

process of negotiation ensued, which resulted in two Sisters of Mercy and one Rosary Sister, being on a co-ordinating team. Sister Margaret Bubb, an experienced educator who had made the change from teacher to vocation centre director, religious education co-ordinator and pastoral/catechetics staff member, and was highly qualified in personal and spiritual development (PRH), was appointed co-ordinator. Sister RoseMary, who was well known and respected by the sisters, and Sister Madeleine, the former Leader of the Rosary Sisters, were on the co-ordinating team. Sister Gail Colquhoun SMSM was chosen to provide input on personal development and spirituality, but also for her ability to get on well with others.



Sister Margaret Bubb.



Sister RoseMary and group of Sisters of St. Therese.

The renewal year was to be in 1985 and for this, all the sisters congregated on the remote Catholic mission station at Bundi on the border between Madang and Simbu, to allow a conducive atmosphere and space for the serious task ahead.

Sister Martha Lonai's reflections

Sister Martha, the current Leader of the Sisters of St Therese, explained that in the crisis faced by the sisters after the death of their founder, Archbishop Noser, Margaret was sensitive to the sisters' need to learn to discern and come to own their identity as a viable group. With this in mind, she encouraged the sisters to hold a sense and knowledge of their own history, and thus, to prepare to write their own constitutions. As co-ordinator, she also engaged in the tasks of arranging and facilitating the courses, helping with the financial records, and making arrangements for resource personnel.

Martha reflects on the process that led to their re-founding as a congregation:

The co-ordinating team were more or less being and standing with us. If there was tension, they did not say much but were with us by their presence. I know they were listening to the Spirit, and to us. They were open to the movement of the Spirit and would allow us time and space to reflect on what was happening. They were also able to respond and communicate with the Archbishop. Towards the end of the renewal year, Margaret was

convinced – with utter conviction – that the sisters had come to and faced the turning point that the members of our Congregation of the Sisters of St Therese were able to live their own life, be responsible for their own actions, and committed to their own ministries. She helped us set the goal and plan for the congregation to follow through, and she followed up what was happening with examples in her own congregation.

In 1995, Margaret came up to Madang to give a PRH session and spent some time with the sisters. She has kept in touch by letters and by visiting us. Her presence with the young sisters made a big impact. Her presence has made a really big difference to us as a congregation.¹⁴

Sister Rita Hassett – Lecturer and Dean of Studies at Good Shepherd Seminary



In the late 1980s, there was a movement among the clergy of the Highlands to provide a new form of regional seminary training. With Archbishop Brian Barnes as the head of the Commission for Seminarians and Priestly Formation, it was decided that a new seminary for the Madang, Highlands and Wewak Dioceses would begin at Maiwara in the Madang Diocese, with Father Peter van Adrikam, an experienced and highly regarded missionary, as rector. In the new pastoral model, courses combining theory, practice and spirituality would replace the first years of the largely academic training of the major seminary at Bomana. Upon successful completion of the pastoral program, seminarians would then proceed to Bomana to complete the final years of seminary studies. It was hoped that this approach would provide a more balanced program to help future priests to be more effective in ministry in their home places, having been influenced by realistic pastoral role models.

The person chosen to work with Father Peter in this new venture of a regional major seminary was Sister Rita Hassett, who was highly experienced and qualified in the training and formation of catechists and teachers and in pastoral ministry. At the time, she was working in the Diocese of Wabag (Enga), and it was Bishop Hermann Raich who communicated the request of the Bishop's Committee for her to be on the seminary staff in the capacity of Dean of Studies.

Humble Beginnings. Sister Rita explains their difficult beginnings in 1990¹⁵ with 33 students in the former catechist training centre, some 20 kilometres out of Madang.

It started from nothing, or next to nothing. It was unbelievable. It was the old catechists' school. We started the concept of a much more grassroots type of training program where it was self-sufficiency as much as possible and things like that. We had no teaching staff, and we had to do the cooking, the seminarians had to make their beds, make gardens, they had to do the most basic things.

Support Staff. Sister Rita explained how the teaching of philosophy and psychology was particularly difficult because the students were not adequately prepared for tertiary education. Although they had reached a certain degree of proficiency in English and Mathematics, they were lacking in language skills, study skills and the discipline of study. Furthermore, there was no library. Building up an ethos of study and research was very challenging in the first year.

It was hard work finding teachers of Philosophy, and Sister Rita had to "go round and find staff, and so you ended up buying, borrowing teachers from all over." Among these were Marist Brothers from Divine Word Institute who assisted until a Jesuit, who was a specialist in Philosophy, came up from Australia. Two national priests who came in support of the new venture were Fathers Matthew Landu and Arnold Orowae, now Bishop of Enga. Moral support of priests involved in seminary training, though limited, was very helpful as it offered Father Peter, in particular, the opportunity in the growing stages, to discuss and refine the theological and pastoral foundations that guided his vision.

Developments. Gradually the routines were established and the foundations laid for an alternative model in priestly formation. In the years ahead, this institution of Good Shepherd Seminary would continue at Banz serving future diocesan clergy in the vast region of the Highlands (Goroka, Simbu, Enga, Mount Hagen, Mendi, Lae, Madang, Wewak and Aitape).

Divine Word University, Madang

Divine Word Institute, Madang - a joint venture of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Holy Spirit Sisters - was granted University status in 1996¹⁶. The first Sister of Mercy to be on the staff of Divine Word University was Sister Petronia Gawi. With Father Jan Czuba SVD as President, Petronia combined academic duties with those of Dean of Women Students. For a short time, Sister Agnes Murphy, widely experienced in tertiary teaching and administration as Head of Department of Mathematics and Science at Aiyura National High School, and as Deputy Principal at Holy Trinity Teachers College, served as Registrar in 2000, before responding to the sisters' request to apply for the position of Principal of Yarapos.

Sister Catherine Jambet was a full-time student at Divine Word University and completed a Diploma in PNG Studies. Sisters Petronia Gawi and Angeline Singiat, while continuing their commitment to tertiary education, completed the Masters in Educational Leadership by the mixed mode of residential and distance education. Petronia is currently on the staff of Divine Word University engaged in Distance Education.

Andrew Simpson CFC, Vice President, DWU ¹⁷ and Chair of the Catholic Higher Education Association (CHEA), explained the background to a recent initiative the Sisters of Mercy had taken in the teaching of Religious Education in the Catholic teachers colleges (2001-2005).

Originally the need for overall upgrading and developing a common Religious Education syllabus in the Catholic Teachers College was expressed by Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer. When the five-year AusAid funded PASTEP (Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project) for curriculum upgrading in the teachers colleges, was introduced, it soon became evident that Religious Education was a low and controversial priority. Brother Andrew lost no time in addressing the need, seeking funding from Missio in Aachen and Munich. Consequently a parallel program for upgrading of Religious Education was devised.

Andrew himself took on a facilitating, supporting and (financial) accounting role while Sister Carmel Martin, followed by Sister Helen White, took on the co-ordination and implementation of the program. Brother Gerry Buzolic CFC was also involved in curriculum writing and editorial work. Seminars and workshops on staff development, methodology and curriculum writing and delivery were held in St Benedict's, Kaindi and Holy Trinity, Mount Hagen, Kabaleo in Rabaul and Divine Word University in Madang. By the completion of the five-year program in 2005, the national staff of the teachers colleges had gained in knowledge and methodology, and upgraded curriculum materials were put in place.

As part of the program Sister Peta Goldberg RSM from the Brisbane congregation visited PNG three times and conducted workshops in praxis method, in writing of Religious Education units and in demonstrating appropriate methodologies. Peta, Head of the National School of Religious Education and the inaugural Chair of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University, offered a wealth of experience gained from working with pre-service and in-service teachers in the area of religious education.¹⁸

Madang – a place of welcome over the years

From the 1956 beginnings in Goroka, the Sisters of Mercy have felt a special bond with the Madang Archdiocese through the Alexishafen Mission. It was here that the pioneer sisters first met their Bishop, Adolf Noser SVD, and stepped on to the ground of the vicariate to which they then belonged. The sisters witnessed some of the post-war evidence of what the historian Father Frank Mihalic SVD termed the 'resurrection of Alexishafen'.¹⁹ It was from here that Bishop Noser accompanied the sisters by plane to Goroka. In the years since then the sisters experienced the hospitality offered to them in the vicariate headquarters at Alexishafen as they went for annual holidays, retreats conducted by world renowned scholars and theologians, or urgent dental treatment from the kindly Brother Gonzaga SVD. Sometimes their worn-out shoes were air-lifted to and from Alexishafen for the meticulous attention of Brother Venantius, the musician shoe-maker who had survived the strafed 'Yorishime Maru'²⁰ and for the rest of his life carried a piece of shrapnel in his hip as a memento.²¹ When the only transport was by air, the SVD pilots, Father Henry Hoff, Father Joseph Wallachy, Brother Ben Seng (also aircraft engineer) and Brother Larry Camilleri were ever obliging to the sisters in their ventures to and from Alexishafen. This service was more frequent before the construction of the Highlands Highway and road links with Madang and Lae, but continued intermittently until the Divine Word Airways went out of operation in Madang in late 1990, after 55 years of mission flying²². After Father Harry McGee, first Father Hoff, and then Father Walachy sadly lost their lives in aeroplane accidents in the cause of mission flying in the Highlands. Brother Ben, the cheerful and helpful 'Aussie' handyman, welcomed on many an isolated mission station, also suffered a fatal air crash while on a commercial plane in the Highlands.

The Holy Spirit Sisters – many of whom worked in the same Highlands and Coastal areas, and shared similar diocesan and national visions for mission in primary education, health, vocational education and pastoral work – cheered the hearts of Mercy Sisters in transit with their friendly and welcome hospitality. The bravery of the Holy Spirit Sisters, who originally came as a life-long commitment to open up the tropical mission fields in the Wewak and Madang Dioceses, was an enduring source of inspiration to the newcomers from Australia. Strong bonds of friendship were forged with the Sisters of St Therese who were ministering near or with the

Mercy Sisters in Simbu and Enga, and the group of qualified 'auxiliaries' led by Genevieve Bühler, who had dedicated their entire lives to the diocese (Genevieve was well-known and respected for her work in the primary curriculum for Religious Education. Denise Verhecken brightened the day of many a Sister of Mercy, otherwise stranded at Madang Airport, as she offered them refreshments and accommodation at the diocesan headquarters at Madang).

When Bishop Arkfeld succeeded Archbishop Noser as Bishop of Madang, the occasional presence of Wewak Mercy Sisters was more noticeable as they interrupted their Wewak to Port Moresby flight connections to touch down at Madang. There they renewed their friendships with the much-loved flying Bishop who had instigated such a flowering of Mercy mission involvement in the Wewak Diocese. Many were the sisters, arriving unexpectedly in Madang, who experienced hospitality at the diocesan headquarters of the succeeding Archbishops - Benedict ToVarpin and William Kurtz SVD.²³ Mercy Sisters have gathered together for their assemblies at the Conference Centre, hosted by Brother Walter Fuchs SVD. This short overview would not be complete without recognition and appreciation of the support given by so many former colleagues and mentors now at Divine Word University, led by Vice Chancellor, Father Jan Czuba, but whose names are too many to mention.

The Sisters of Mercy hold dear the memories of these life-long friends of the Madang Diocese.



Sister Catherine Jambet on Graduation Day, DWU.

ARCHDIOCESE OF RABAU – KERAVAT NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

The particular ministry of Sisters of Mercy in the National High School system was carried out by several sisters at Aiyura in Goroka (1978-1989) beginning with Sister Bernadette Marks, and at Passam in Wewak (1980-1992) beginning with Sister Fran Hanrahan. These ministries were in dioceses where the Sisters of Mercy were well established. When Sister Cynthia Griffin volunteered from Adelaide to teach in the system in 1983, the national education authorities appointed her to Keravat on the Rabaul peninsula which they considered as the place of the greatest need. Thus, Cynthia was the first Sister of Mercy to work in the Rabaul Archdiocese. How did this come about?

National High Schools were set up in four main regions at Sogeri, Aiyura, Keravat and Passam – to offer matriculation studies to prepare students selected on merit for entry to tertiary levels of education. The purpose was not only to achieve high academic standards, but also to build a national consciousness and identity. Consequently, students were selected from the different provinces reflecting the national context and encouraged to live and work in unity and harmony through a respect for the diverse cultures. However, a serious disruption occurred at Keravat, when internal tensions and upheavals involving staff and students resulted in violence and destruction of property. The situation was so serious and so prolonged that an official investigation was carried out. When a fragile peace was restored, the principals of Passam (Brother Pat Howley FMS) and Keravat (Lionel Melville), having seen the non-threatening and mediating role Bernadette Marks had played at Aiyura, and aware of the feminine and professional influence of the other Sisters of Mercy in the education field, recommended that Cynthia be appointed there to teach Social Science and be Dean of Women.

During the first weeks, Cynthia stayed with the principal, Lionel Melville and his wife, while a house was renovated and painted and the holes in the floor repaired to clear the dwelling of the families of rats that had settled there. Cynthia explained the work routines carried out by the staff (who were almost entirely expatriate when she arrived) and the situation of the Catholic students:

I taught 26 out of 28 lessons and had to do a great deal of preparation to get it right for the students, particularly the political history. Coping with 5 hours of school service each week took a great deal of energy. When the turn for supervision came round and you were the teacher responsible for that day, you had boarding duties till 11 pm.

There were more than 200 Catholic students and Mass was held in the school hall on Sunday evenings. John Golding was the parish priest and chaplain at the school. I saw it important that the students' religious education grow with their academic knowledge in order to bridge the gap between the childhood and adult faith, which is always a dilemma for adolescents.²⁴

The contract obligations for expatriate staff were similar in all the National High Schools and the drive for localisation was an integral part of the system. As Head of Department (English), Cynthia (as indeed the other Mercy Sisters in the National High School system) was responsible for the encouragement and training of national staff and for planning their further studies and training courses.

When Cynthia was posted to Passam National High School in 1987, Sister Josette McDonell from Holy Trinity Teachers College succeeded her, continuing as Dean of Women, with English as her subject specialisation. In her letter seeking a replacement for 1988, she explained how she saw her ministry:

There are only four National High Schools in PNG. These accommodate Years 11 and 12, so to these come a very small percentage of candidates from Provincial High Schools. About twelve thousand sit for the Grade 10 examination; of these only about nine hundred can obtain a place in National High Schools. These are the top ten percent of the country in ability. The Bishops see these young people as the possible and potential leaders of this quickly-developing country whose Constitutions pledge to 'uphold Christian principles'.

So... these young people are special... additionally so since many among them are Catholics. The girls have been allowed to come only after some painful soul searching and prayer on the part of their parents, for Government schools do not have the prevailing atmosphere of faith that the Catholic Provincial High Schools had from which they have come. The presence of a sister helps protect the sometimes frail faith of these young Catholics, which, at times, comes under pressure; regretfully, on occasion even from staff members.

Parents agonise over the dilemma - should they allow their child to accept a coveted place in National High School and put their faith at risk, or deprive her of such an opportunity and safeguard her faith? Some of the letters I received from parents show this anxiety to be very real. To quote from two... "Pauline is our older daughter, her mother and I are concerned very much about her spiritual upbringing... we are aware of dangers confronting students in a co-ed situation... I can remain in peace, knowing that my daughter will be cared for..." (father). Again, from a mother. "We understand there are changes and dangers she will face... but... a few words of advice can always remind her of her Catholic faith.

The sister here works with the non-resident Catholic chaplain, an MSC who comes each Tuesday for Mass for the students, in my house, followed by religious instruction for one hour. Though optional, over one hundred students attend weekly. On Sunday, Mass is celebrated for the student body. This is all we can offer them, spiritually, apart from the daily awareness of their presence and their needs.

There are warm, welcoming MSC fathers, OLSH Sisters who open their doors and hearts simultaneously. There are Catholic families - the best. Other Mercies? No, you must hold them in your heart... they are all far away, but our group of PNG sisters is very special and supportive from a distance.²⁵

Despite Josette's plea for more sisters for this ministry, and an appeal by the Archbishop, Albert Bundervoet MSC, none could be spared, as a marked overall decrease in the number of sisters continued to be felt. In the early 1990s, the sisters had to face the closures of Kairiru (1970-1993), Kondiu (1974-1990), Dreikir (1979-1992), Pumakos (1965-1992), and Aitape (1977-1992). In addition, localisation was increasingly being effected in the National High Schools, while the introduction and rapid spread of the upper secondary schools in the provinces, as part of the educational reform, offered a popular alternative to the existing National High Schools. Their fundamental purpose as national institutions seemed to be in question more through lack of government funding and resourcing than by any definite policy.

National Mercy nursing trainees in the Islands Region

Some young national Sisters of Mercy completed their professional nursing qualifications in the Islands region. Sister Helen Kiponge completed her Diploma as a registered nurse at St Mary's School of Nursing, Vunapope, in Rabaul, while Sisters Sebastina Yangen and Philomena Waira completed their qualifications at Lemakot School of Nursing in New Ireland. For a time, Sister Margaret Wilson (formerly Simbu, Mount Hagen, Aitape and Guyana in South America) was Lecturer in Nurse Education at Lemakot, while the MSC Principal, Sister Arnolde Saulhaber was on leave in Europe.



Sister Terry Gongi at shrine of (Bainings) martyrs.

DIOCESE OF BOUGAINVILLE

The plight of the Bougainville people during the nine-year struggle (1987-1997) was keenly felt by many all over the country, right down to the grassroots population. Loss of life, division among families, fear of enemy reprisals, deprivation of homes and land, poverty and hunger, were all part of daily existence of the various groups involved, whether they were the ordinary people, the Bougainville Resistance Army (BRA), the PNG Defence Force, or other militants aligned to resistance or government forces. As with every disaster, there were instances of heroism – putting one's life in danger for another's safety, struggling for reconciliation and peace, and, in the face of violence, coming to exercise forgiveness.

The author's personal experience

I can speak of such things because, like many others, I heard of them through the media and personally from Bougainville friends and acquaintances. I was there on Bougainville as an educational consultant (recommended by the Jesuit Refugee Service through the Mercy Refugee Service of Australia) in 1995 when the first tentative attempts at peace were being made, and again in 1997 after the peace settlement, known as the 'Lincoln Agreement' had been agreed to by all parties at a special gathering in New Zealand. I saw some of the devastation and witnessed some step-by-step efforts towards peace, culminating in joyous hope of family and clan reunions in the remote areas of Bougainville. Sadly, the work of rehabilitation and reconstruction takes a long time, and the trauma tends to linger on, particularly in the case of the children.

Undoubtedly the effectiveness of many of the recommendations suggested by the United Nations Mission, and endorsed by Bougainville and the PNG Government, would have been tempered by constraints. However, there is evidence from follow-up visits that some educational benefits filtered through to give hope to the many whose education had been disrupted or discontinued. For example, the commitment of University of Goroka staff to teacher upgrading through academic and practical programs conducted on the island, the improvement of materials and facilities for distance education (CODE) in the most disadvantaged areas, and the upgrading of school resources and facilities.

The Sisters of Nazareth (CSNs), an indigenous diocesan congregation, stayed throughout the crisis, enduring the hardships and undergoing detention along with their people. Some suffered because of their care and protection of the overseas missionaries. When it was possible to do so, Sister Marie Murphy from Bathurst visited the sisters on a short-term basis, to be with them, offering sisterly support in their time of trial. The CSN Sisters put a request through Sister Teresa Flaherty to the sisters on the mainland of PNG for support in ministry. The MSC Sisters from Rabaul responded, assigning Sister Stephanie Toka, a qualified secondary teacher and former student of Goroka Teachers College, to spend two years at the Asitavi High School, a girls' school founded by the Marist Sisters (SMSM), and since carried on by the CSN Sisters.

In more recent years, Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy, keen to assist the recovering and now autonomous Province, has spent some time on Bougainville conducting HIV/AIDS prevention, awareness and education courses. Earlier mention was made of the assistance given to male and female teacher education students at St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.

DIOCESE OF DARU-KIUNGA

The asylum seekers

The incidence of Melanesians fleeing over the Indonesian border of Irian-Jaya (West Papua) seeking sanctuary in PNG territory erupted in 1978. Between February and June of that year, the number of border crossers increased from 400 to 7,000, and by October, more than 11,000 had walked over the border. In December an agreement was made to allow the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) "to participate in the repatriation exercise and to let Papua New Guinean officials accompany border-crossers returning to their home villages, and make follow-up checks at later times. In return, Papua New Guinea granted political refugee status to 500 Irianese, mostly academics, government officials, and army deserters, who refused to go back to Irian Jaya. At this time, it is estimated that more than 1,000 had already voluntarily returned to their villages, leaving about 9,300 in camps on the border."²⁶

The situation of the asylum seekers from West Papua into Papua New Guinea was a growing concern of the Catholic Church. From the beginning, the refugees' most vocal advocate was the former Bishop of Vanimo, Bishop Etheridge CP. Bishop Gerard Deschamps SMM of the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, was also supportive. Shortly after the establishment of the relocation site for the refugees in East Awin, Sister Helen White voluntarily spent her entire summer holidays of seven weeks teaching English to the teachers, together with Brother John Stevenson CFC, both from St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.

A Sisters of Mercy Project

Realising the need for a more continuous on the ground approach, Sister Margaret Moore, Director of Mercy Refugee Service (which is now structured within Mercy Works Incorporated) relying on the first-hand reports of Fathers Mark Raper SJ and Frank Brennan SJ, put forward a proposal for a Mercy Refugee Project. This was welcomed by the Bishop of Kiunga, Gilles Côté, who invited two sisters to be involved in community development work. Sister Maureen Sexton arrived in May 2003 to work at diocesan level, and Sister Catherine Corbett came in May 2004 to be involved at parish level. Both sisters came to PNG with wide experience in development work among refugees in other countries.

A vast and problematic location

Maureen writes of her PNG experiences:²⁷

Kiunga is a mining port on the Fly River (the largest river in PNG), 800 kilometres in from the southern coast of PNG, which is not that far from the North of Australia. In 1959, Kiunga was four or five traditional houses situated on the top of a small mound surrounded by jungle swamps. With the advent of the Catholic Mission in the 1960s and later the Ok Tedi mine in the 1980s it has become a busy port township with a population of about 8000. The population expands to over 10,000-15,000 on alternate weekends [when] people who live along the highway or down the river come in for compensation payouts from the Ok Tedi Trust.

Kiunga depends on container ships that come up the river, when the river is down the

boats get stuck or can't come up or down, so we run out of fuel... We have really felt the pinch of no containers coming in: the hospitals have no medicines and the two other health agencies are very low on stock, the only Shell station has been closed down and the mission has no petrol and a little diesel, we put 5 litres into our vehicles at a time, the trading stores are running low on stock and have been severely rationing rice and other dry foodstuffs.

There was rain in the mountains last weekend and the river did come up enough to allow three ships to come in – they brought equipment for a logging company which is just starting operations, so large heavy equipment, plus fuel, foodstuffs and other supplies, but no medicines.

Liaison role with refugee parents and schools

I have a liaison role between parents and schools which involves updating or compiling an accurate picture of the number of refugee children in schools in the North Fly Region of the Western Province each year. Last year, we had 365+ children in Year 7 and above, in a total of 17 schools. Already I have been informed of another 4 primary schools which will increase the above number significantly this year. The numbers selected for Year 9 are about the same as last year, the number for higher secondary has increased slightly with 4 girls amongst them. I have been told parents from 2 places up the highway have permission from landowners in Kiunga to build small bush dormitories for their children, so they can attend schools here. This means there will be an extra 2 if not 3 corners for me to visit this year. A corner is a cluster of houses, generally based on family/clan relationships.

I have a feeling I will find the situation in these corners inadequate for student housing which begs the questions can something be done to halt such movements? I don't know; the factors bringing them into Kiunga are strong. Village leaders or parents come in so excited to tell us what they are planning in the hope we will help. My heart sometimes sinks because I imagine it won't be too long before students come saying they have no school materials, no food and they need clothing, etc.

The border refugee children are really not meant to be able to access the education system in the sense that the government does not provide teachers for schools in the settlements they come from and they are not supposed to move freely into other areas. It is a tricky and complex situation but I feel myself erring on the side that every child has a right to education. I find both despair at the situation of education in the settlements along the river and admiration of the effort by parents who have found a way to educate one if not two or three of their children. As in many developing countries this is usually boys in preference to girls.

I am presently preparing some material on how to encourage young girls/women to stay at school until Year 10, Year 12 and maybe even higher studies. As with many other societies young women here are given the opportunities to study after the boys/young men in the family. I am also involved in assisting the Catholic Health Agency provide basic services to the refugee settlements, for example, supporting the monitoring and aid post workers in eight refugee settlements and assisting with two Maternal and Child Health

patrols each year.

Movement across the border

During these past few weeks I have met parents and village leaders from many of the border settlements in the North Fly Region of the Western Province. I've also made visits to Iowara, the official Refugee Relocation Site early this month... What we do hear from people who move across the border for family or personal reasons is that most are wary of and conscious of a military presence in West Papua. I sense the general feeling is that people feel safe if they go about their ordinary business but if someone was to speak about or engage in political activities they would be putting themselves and their family at risk. This seems to be backed up by observers and others who are more authorised to know the actual situation in West Papua than I am.

On a more personal note, of late I have had some insights into the reasons a person or family stays or returns to West Papua. The dilemma centres around the deep desire for family unity in the new country and for burial in one's homeland. There is a certain amount of trauma attached to the decision because visiting the burial site of a close relative is important. The health and well being of ancestors is woven into the life of Melanesians.

There are over 300 refugees coming through Kiunga at the end of September (2004). They have been in Vanimo and are moving to East Awin, the official camp site... I was talking to someone from the Catholic Health Agency this morning and she thought our support would be welcomed.

Introducing Sister Catherine Corbett

Catherine Corbett, my companion, is delightful, she has a really good sense of humour. People had told her to be careful of crocodiles, snakes and spiders. She has written back home after two patrols saying she is more worried about seriously hurting herself from falls when the ground is really slippery (really) and of drowning when crossing streams in full flood or disappearing in thigh depth mud when wading into the boat. She is less than five feet tall!

Catherine's far reaching parish ministry²⁸

Catherine is involved with various meetings with the local women, where she listens to their needs and concerns and participates in moving some of these forward.

These needs and concerns relate to pastoral, spiritual and physical areas of their lives. Catherine has been working closely with the Refugee Women's Co-ordinator and has travelled with her to the three corners of the diocese to encourage women to participate in their respective Women's Centres. Catherine, in her role as an advocate for the women, also co-facilitated the 'Help Peace Increase' workshop. Through these workshops women learned their rights in relation to domestic violence and strategies to combat domestic violence.

Catherine makes regular border patrols with the parish team to eight border camps and seven local villages. She is on these patrols from between eight to twelve days straight at a

time. The purpose of the patrols is to take the sacraments to the people, spend time with them and take any news or materials that the women have requested.

Within a contemporary context

The two Sisters, Maureen and Catherine, carry out their ministry within the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, which is under the leadership of Bishop Gilles Côté. While their mission perspectives reflect those of the diocese, and indeed the sisters contribute in the planning of such, the implementation of their goals encompasses collaboration and close working relationships with the relevant government departments and NGOs. Moving with such flexibility and open-heartedness tends to belie the great skill, experience and patience – and willingness to learn – required in the circumstances.

Some of the PNG Mercy Sisters engaged in other ministries, have expressed appreciation of the new untravelled road of ministry to refugees, and their desire, if given the opportunity for training and experience in this area, to follow in the footsteps of these two intrepid women working on the border.



Sister Maureen Sexton with West Papuan refugees in Kiunga.

Endnotes

- ¹ First established at Yule Island on August 1, 1997.
- ² Mother Philomena Ryman offered this information (which is also available in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney) in a research interview.
- ³ Taken from an early report written by Sister Christine Watt, found in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- ⁴ This refers to the close relationship of family and clan members.
- ⁵ Taken from an interview with Sister Julie Anne Ryan in 2005.
- ⁶ This was reinforced by two representatives of the male religious congregations, Father Kevin Hennessy CP, and Brother Philip Redding CFC.
- ⁷ Sister Maria Koiaie offered these comments at Xavier Institute in May, 2006.
- ⁸ Criminal gangs.
- ⁹ This account is taken from the Congress of the Union of Women Religious PNG and SI "The Holy Spirit is the Author of our Story", August 15, 1985, Marianville College, Bomana, p. 15. This document is preserved in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne.
- ¹⁰ Letter dated July 25, 1981, written by the Handmaids of the Lord seeking volunteers for the core community.
- ¹¹ At different times the core community comprised Sister Charlyne Wolfe OSF, Sister Marie Dominic AD, Sister Bibiana AD and Sister Marie Langtry CSB - two sisters from the Solomon Islands - Sisters Denis DMI and Nellie DMI - and Sister Norbertine OLSH.
- ¹² Sister Theresia Gongi offered these reflections on her ministry in May, 2005.
- ¹³ Through participation in the first extensive Pastoral Catechetical Course held in Maiwara, Madang, in 1973.
- ¹⁴ This account was given by Sister Martha Lonai in Adelaide, July, 2006.
- ¹⁵ The account of the beginnings of Good Shepherd Seminary was given by Sister Rita Hassett in an informal conversation, in May, 2005.
- ¹⁶ Mihalik, F., SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPS Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*. Madang: DWU Press, 1998, p. 225.
- ¹⁷ Communicated at DWU on June 10, 2007.
- ¹⁸ From Brisbane Mercy Newsletter on Reconfiguring, No 8. Apr-May, 2007.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 50, p. 37.
- ²⁰ *ibid.* The massacre of missionaries on the Japanese ship in World War II, p. 45.
- ²¹ *ibid.* p. 45.
- ²² *ibid.* p. 41.
- ²³ Archbishop William Kurtz, friend and co-worker of the sisters in the Simbu in the sixties and seventies, and the first Bishop of Kundiawa.
- ²⁴ This account was given by Sister Cynthia Griffin, May, 2007.
- ²⁵ The circular letter of 21/3/1988 seeking recruits for Keravat National High school was entitled "Anyone for Paradise?" A copy is kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.
- ²⁶ Waiko, John Dademo. *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press. 1993.pp 199-200.
- ²⁷ Excerpts are taken from email communications found in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne, and a Mercy Works publication (Autumn 2006).
- ²⁸ Taken from an excerpt from Mercy Works publication, Autumn 2006.



ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT MORESBY

Xavier Institute

Moira Cleary	Cheryl Camp
Winifred McManus	Marie Murphy
Helen O'Brien	Joan O'Toole
Julie Anne Ryan	Christine Watt
Helen White	

Holy Spirit Seminary

Bomana

Helen White

National Department

of Education

Joan O'Toole
Moira Cleary

House of Prayer

Nazareth

Winifred McManus

ARCHDIOCESE OF MADANG

Formation and Training with Sisters of St. Therese

RoseMary Baker Margaret Bubb

Divine Word University

Petronia Gawi, Agnes Murphy
Students: Catherine Jambet, Angeline Singiat.

ARCHDIOCESE OF RABAU

Keravat National High School

Cynthia Griffin, Josette McDonell

St. Mary's School of Nursing

Students: Helen Kiponge, Theresia Gongi, Philomena Waira

DIOCESE OF KAVIENG/LORENGAU

School of Nursing - Lemakot

Students: Sebastina Yangin, Philomena Waira

DIOCESE OF MENDI

School of Nursing: Det

Claudia Apalenda

DIOCESE OF DARU/KIUNGA

Helen White, Maureen Sexton, Catherine Corbett

DIOCESE OF BOUGAINVILLE

Peace and rehabilitation programs

Teresa Flaherty, Maura O'Shaughnessy, Marie Murphy





First Sisters of Mercy Assembly - Wewak, 1980.

Chapter 10

WEAVING A BILUM OF PNG MERCY

It is now the time and place to look into the significant, and sometimes seemingly small steps, leading to the establishment of the multi-cultural autonomous region of the Sisters of Mercy PNG in 2006¹. Along the way we see footprints of the indigenous sisters - at first beside the Australian sisters, then increasingly on their own - taking responsibility in leadership and formation of new members, and adapting to mission according to their Mercy vocation.



UNITY AND AUTONOMY: CREATING A NEW DESIGN

Since the Sisters of Mercy united as one in 1981, expatriate and indigenous sisters have continued to gather together to discern the call of the Spirit in their lives. In their meetings, particularly in the five-yearly elective and mid-term assemblies, the sisters have used symbols adapted from daily life in Melanesia to express shared values or new directions. At different times, the coconut has symbolised new birth; the mighty *kwila* tree², growth and strength; the canoe, the collective working together as one; and the *bilum*, the patient intricate weaving of different threads to form a fine, strong, beautiful, essential net-bag for women. The *bilum*, in particular, is considered a feminine symbol used for the most precious and essential things a woman carries – first, and above all, for her baby, then for garden food, or firewood. It is a symbol of her enduring love and care for her family.

The symbol of the *bilum* is used to express the growth in religious formation in the same way as the clay pot is formed in the hands of the Potter (Jeremiah 18:1-12). "Just as a *bilum* in the making changes its shape, colour and design we, the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea, believe that we are continually being formed by the God of all Mercy to receive and carry God's compassionate love, joy and forgiveness to each other and to a needy people."

The image of the *Bilum-Maker* at work comes easily to the mind of a Melanesian woman. There is the loving preparation of natural fibre or woollen thread, the patient weaving of the *bilum* by hand, the undoing and re-making in intricate twists and turns with the design, unfolding as stitch follows stitch, and her sense of purpose and anticipation of a unique and beautiful creation. This new patterning for the Sisters of Mercy in the deft fingers of the *Bilum-Maker* depicts their growth towards an autonomous region, leadership and responsibility undertaken by the indigenous sisters and their commitment to Mercy mission.

These cultural symbols are an attempt to capture the movement of the Spirit, but are to be interpreted with due awareness of their limitations. Just as Jeremiah's image of the pot being created by the potter expresses God's nurturing and enduring love for all, so too, the Melanesian symbol of the *bilum*, used here by the Sisters of Mercy, may be seen as enfolding all God's creation. The word 'daughters' is a reminder that the indigenous sisters carry on their traditions of mercy and compassion embedded in their Melanesian roots, now deepened and renewed with the Christian essence of Mercy. In Mercy, they are daughters of their culture, of the Catholic Church, and of Catherine McAuley, but they are also 'sisters' with full rights, dignity and responsibility in their Church and world.

Drawing the threads together

Although 1981 falls roughly in the middle of the 50-year period (1956-2006), the first and second halves are intertwined. The various founding groups established stability of governance, lived a commitment to Mercy religious life and witnessed a dedication to the mission of Christ for the liberation of all peoples, including a deep respect for their cultures. This laid the foundation for the events that led to the acceptance of postulants in 1980 and unification in 1981.

When Sister Helen O'Brien accepted responsibility as the elected National Superior in 1981, there were 44 Sisters of Mercy from Australia in PNG. Helen began the vital task of drawing the bonds of unity together among the previously separate groups and selecting sisters to leave familiar places for the sake of building up the whole. She courageously and conscientiously managed as a somewhat itinerant Leader until a permanent administration centre was established at McAuley House, Mount Hagen in 1989.

At first, the leaders of the four diocesan regions, Wewak, Goroka, Mount Hagen and Aitape, became the members of the leadership team. As the newly formed Institute in Australia had no canonical authority over the sisters in PNG, different Australian congregations (Brisbane, Adelaide, North Sydney and Melbourne) took on an authorising role for each region. In time, the Brisbane Congregation became the single authorising congregation, and as the sisters became more united as a single group, leadership team members were elected as representatives of the total group rather than a particular region.

Since then, the Leaders, Sisters Helen O'Brien (1981-1983, 1984-1986, 1999-2002), Joan MacGinley (1987-1992), Maura O'Shaughnessy (1993-1998) and Mariska Kua (2003-2007) and their team members have taken responsibility of care for the many sisters dispersed throughout several dioceses. United with the sisters in their belief that the emergence of the autonomous Melanesian congregation was God's work, they were guided by the Assembly mandates leading towards this.

Sister Helen O'Brien played a significant role in the initial stages of unifying the sisters and guiding the establishment of formation policy and practice. She 'mentored' indigenous sisters in leadership practice and skills in preparation for the future, particularly during her last term of office. However, besides this guiding role, Helen carried out a unique pastoral and formative role among the sisters during the major part of this period (1981-2002), not only during her leadership terms, but also through her influence as vicar (1993-1998) and as formator of the junior professed sisters (1987-1992). Helen explains this aspect of her calling:

I met the first of the young women who expressed a desire to join the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea in 1980. For the next twenty-five years or so my life and the lives of the many who began as 'interested women' as we called them, were inextricably linked. I had a part to play in nurturing them in their journey towards maturity - the maturity of true followers of Jesus, able and eager to commit themselves to lives of love, compassion and fidelity as Sisters of Mercy. It was a journey of partnership and respect.³

Ensuring stable numbers - strengthening the threads

Many sisters came from Australia, 178 in all, although there were never more than 50 in the whole country at any one time, with the majority of these being in the Wewak Diocese. In the 1980s, expatriate numbers were decreasing but the foundation was growing in strength through a small but steady flow of professed PNG members. Creative internal structures to suit Melanesian religious life and ministry were being developed. Examples of these were the interim statutes, policies including principles and practices for formation, finance and administration. To the extent that they were able, expatriate sisters made long-term commitments to serve as 'core' members, and the spirit of this collective will offered stability and continuity. This ensured that personnel were available for leadership, formation and training and development

in these areas, as well as in ministries that were evolving according to the changing 'signs of the times'. Sisters from Australia were also encouraged to come for short-term contracts in ministry. An analysis of the composition of the total Australian group shows that 114 sisters served for a period of 1 to 9 years, 34 from 10 to 19 years, 22 from 20 to 29 years, and 8 for a period of 30 to 39 years.

The Australian congregation leaders continued their commitment to the growth of the united PNG Mercy group by providing personnel and contributing financial help. The Leaders of the Institute, in particular, played an influential, supportive, updating and financial role. Their expertise and guidance was essential as the canonical requirements of an 'autonomous region' were negotiated. Indeed, the principle of the growth towards autonomy was firmly held by the sisters in PNG and in Australia.

Policies towards an autonomous congregation

As a result of a resolution of the 1987 National Assembly of Mercy Sisters, a dual task force was set up in Australia and Papua New Guinea to explore the needs of the emerging congregation. Dr Deirdre Jordan RSM was requested to carry out extensive research which included consulting all the sisters in PNG. On completion of this process, Deirdre presented a report on the viability of the congregation and possible future directions in the light of diminishing recruitment of Australian sisters and the expressed needs of the national sisters in community and ministry. These findings were considered in Australia by Sisters Kath Burke, Pauline Smith, Marie Gaudry and Dorothy Campion. The report was presented and the issues pursued at the PNG Sisters' Assembly in 1990. Resolutions taken at this gathering show a clear direction towards an autonomous congregation.

Being an autonomous congregation will enable us to be, and to be recognised as a more authentic part of the local Church of Papua New Guinea. This recognition of a distinct identity is merely the formalising of the reality, a development that has already taken place.

In view of the rapid localisation in Papua New Guinea, the time is ripe for the formation of an autonomous congregation. The national sisters feel strongly the need to be prepared in the event of the political situation calling for the withdrawal of all expatriates. Papua New Guinea is following a bureaucratic mould, a western mould, so our congregation cannot be separated from this thrust within the nation. Therefore we feel that it is expedient to become an autonomous congregation now. The desire of the national sisters to establish a multicultural congregation can be seen as a countersign, transcending national barriers and giving witness to the universality of the Church.⁴

At the 1992 Assembly, the naturally evolving model of a 'multicultural' autonomous congregation was adopted. This reflected the composition of the group: national sisters from their different clans and the expatriate sisters from different homelands – Australia, Ireland, and one each from New Zealand and Vietnam.

By this time, governance by means of 'shared leadership' was practised. Simply put, this involved the leader and team making decisions on issues after discernment through consultation with the sisters concerned and collective participation in periodic 'open team meetings'.

Indigenous sisters accept positions of responsibility

As they gained experience in religious life and ministry, indigenous sisters were elected to responsibility in governance in their own right. This practice was directly influenced by Dr Deirdre Jordan's report.

Reflecting on her interviews with each of the sisters, Deirdre recalled that the national sisters felt that they should be responsible for the Mercy Congregation in PNG, but expressed a strong fear that the expatriate sisters might be forced by political pressure to leave before they were ready for this task. In light of this, they saw an urgent need for a PNG sister to represent them on the Council, and a recommendation to this effect was passed by the 1990 Assembly.⁵ It was put into action when Theresia Nakankwien, was elected to the Leadership Team in 1992.

Sister Theresia Nakankwien recalled that when she was elected to the Council she did not want to do it. She felt the burden of being the first national sister and she was only just professed. One of the other national sisters encouraged her, saying that she could do it and would contribute a lot to their group.

I appreciated being on the team, and when they looked at the cultural point of view, I would speak out; I would not sit back. I would see the side of our own PNG culture, and also keep in mind the Mercy culture and the gospel culture. I felt I was contributing by speaking out against anything that was not in line with these values. There were other things I had to learn – that we can all contribute and in that way we all learn things.⁶

There was an understanding that responsibility at this level was also an opportunity for on-the-job training and learning by experience. However, in 2003, the leadership responsibility was placed in the hands of the first indigenous national superior, Sister Mariska Kua, assisted by two PNG and two expatriate team members. At the time, the group comprised 17 professed indigenous sisters and six expatriate sisters. The balance of sisters and the responsibility for the congregation was firmly weighted on the side of the PNG sisters.

The request for status of autonomous region is granted

In 2004, the Sisters of Mercy PNG made a formal request to the Institute to begin the process for the status of 'autonomous region' for the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea within the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia, to be recognised by Rome.

This was granted in 2006.⁷ Twelve finally professed sisters and six in temporary vows from PNG, together with six from Australia, made up the founding group of the autonomous region of the Sisters of Mercy. One candidate (novice) and one enquirer (postulant) prepared to follow in their footsteps. In 2007 there were two candidates, Hilda Yangele and Kunnie Kalango, and one enquirer, Rachel Waisman who was upgrading studies in Catherine's House.

Sister Kath Burke recaptures some of the history

Sister Kath Burke, former Leader of the Brisbane Congregation (the authorising congregation) and Institute President, recaptured some of the issues in working towards an autonomous congregation.

In 1980, history had been made with the entrance of the first postulants, Petronia, Veronica and Theresia. One of my greatest joys was to attend Petronia's first profession at Kaindi and her unforgettable final profession in her village church on the Sepik River. A truly Melanesian experience! During my 12 years as Brisbane Leader and ISMA President, there were many such occasions as well as special gatherings and Assemblies. These gave me great heart for the future of our PNG Mercy family. With a National Superior and local PNG women as Councillors and Formation Personnel, it was clear that Mercy had taken root in PNG and was developing its unique Melanesian/Australian character.

Before these professions, there were complex canonical matters to be settled as PNG was not a congregation in its own right. Father Geoff King SJ was our Canon Lawyer as the device of an Authorising Congregation was used to accept the vows of the PNG women. Brisbane was agreed upon to be this congregation – a fairly tense issue and one that did not please or satisfy everybody. With the appointment of a National Superior, the role of the Authorising Congregation was better understood by all as a canonical responsibility. Helen O'Brien, Joan MacGinley and Maura O'Shaughnessy, have served faithfully as National Superior over the years, ably assisted by their councillors both local and expatriate.

The big issue, especially in my years as President of the Institute, was the move towards an independent PNG Congregation. Sister Deirdre Jordan generously visited PNG, interviewed every sister, wrote a splendid report on the viability of a PNG Mercy Congregation allaying fears and off-setting factional differences. Meantime, Rome made their position clear: a minimum of 40 members, local and/or expatriate, was required. Whilst greatly disappointed with the intransigent Roman position, I admired the down-to-earth spirit of acceptance. PNG women got on with their lives of service, expanded into creative Mercy ministries. The flow of new members continued.

My dream for the future is that Mercy Pacific continues to foster friendship and cultural exchange between PNG, Tonga, Samoa, Australia, New Zealand, Guam and the Philippines. One day, we may be able to rejoice in Mercy Pacific becoming a region of World Mercy.⁸

MERCY ADMINISTRATION CENTRE - McAULEY HOUSE

It was to be several years before the sisters enjoyed the stability of a permanent administration centre. In 1989, under the leadership of Sister Joan MacGinley, and guided by Sister Nance Munro's expertise in practical financial matters, the sisters acquired a property in Mount Hagen. Located on the outskirts of the commercial district in the centre of Hagen town, this private residence was large enough, with the added rooms of the 'garden house', to provide the offices required for administration and permanent and occasional accommodation for sisters and visitors. It also had the benefit of being situated across the road from the market, and close to the hospital, St Paul's Church and Secretarial College, and the town's Highlands Highway bus depot. Hagen itself offered direct flights from the airport at Kagemuga to Wewak (and further on to Aitape), Kundiawa and Goroka (and on to Madang, Lae and the Islands) and was an hour's flying time to Port Moresby. Through the Highlands Highway road, travel was accessible to all the Highlands centres and the coast.

The constant care of the sisters

Though secured by a high fence as a protection against vandalism and the encroaching vendors and 'woodmen' on the roadside area, McAuley House had its homely aspects – the constant care of the sisters saw to that. There was the *haus win*,⁹ the steep vegetable garden area, the beautifully kept lawn and borders with shrubs of greenery and flowers of vivid, tropical colour, and the gravelled parking area for the four-wheel drive cars which seemed to be kept on the move with routine trips to the town, for ministry, or picking up visitors from the airport. The trusty watch dogs rested near their shelter after their night patrols and there were occasional glimpses of a cat or two taking advantage of the situation, pouncing upon unseen prey with less than usual caution. A few tall trees reaching skywards and framed in restless cloud patterns seemed to anchor the setting.

A Mercy central house

McAuley House became the central gathering place of the Sisters of Mercy in the Highlands. The Highlands-based sisters came together on special weekends for seminars, workshops, jubilee celebrations, and gatherings for young women interested in the Mercy way of life. Visiting sisters from Australia or within PNG were accommodated at McAuley, or, if there was not enough room, at Holy Trinity. The national leaders and their communities at McAuley were committed to the triple purpose of administration, home for the sisters and warm hospitality.

Overall improvements made

In 1999, largely due to the foresight of Sister Julie Anne Ryan, extensions were added to the front section to provide a separate area for administration purposes, including an archive space. The walls of the 'garden house' were also specially treated against dampness and the rooms renovated. In this way, the premises were made more suitable as an office area, a community residence and a place of hospitality.

The archives of PNG Mercy were persistently and consciously nurtured by Sister Agnes Murphy, as appropriate copies of documents she had requested from the Australian Mercy archive centres were added and stored. With the extensions to McAuley House, these records were now adequately and safely placed. On completion of her term as Melbourne Archivist, Sister Joan Doolan spent some weeks sorting and cataloguing the precious collection. In her systematic and careful manner, Joan later came back to ensure the task was completed to her satisfaction.

The extensions also provided the space and room for precious memorabilia. Walking up the steps from the archives section to the conference room, one now sees displayed the beautiful cultural apparel and adornments representing the various home places of the sisters who have made their final profession – ceremonial spear, colourful grass skirt, decorative *pulpuls*,¹⁰ patterned *bilums* and majestic *kundus*.¹¹ Left of the archives section is the small chapel, with its spiritual, yet homely atmosphere, with one's attention being drawn to the tabernacle – a fine wooden object crafted by Brother Phil Redding CFC, originally for Sister Clare's house at Mount Wilhelm.

A home for sisters in formation and ministry

At times, McAuley House was a home to the young sisters discerning their calling to religious life. For example, Catherine Jambet completed her postulancy within the McAuley community, while other sisters from the novitiate lived there for defined periods to experience the normal challenges of community and ministry. Sisters in temporary vows, such as Theresa Boyek (1993) and Schola Fakiwi (1999) lived there while completing the course at St Paul's Secretarial School. After the upsetting incidents and closure of Neragaima, Sister Maryanne Kolkia resided there. When Mariska left teaching duties at the United Church School to assume duties as Vicar, Maryanne succeeded her and completed her Diploma in Education Studies at the Mount Hagen Extension Studies Centre.

Sister Patricia O'Shea assisted Sisters Veronica Lokalyo and Theresia Nakankwien with distance education (CODE) studies, while Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy and Clare Flinn guided Sister Philomena Waira with CODE units in English and Business Studies.

The close proximity of Holy Trinity and McAuley allowed some interchange of sisters and separation from their work place. Sister Veronica Lokalyo spent several years in pastoral work at St Paul's Parish, with some of the time at McAuley and the rest at Holy Trinity. Likewise, Sister Theresia Nakankwien, in her pastoral ministry on the diocesan team, has lived in both places. Theresia was significantly involved in the National Assembly of the Catholic Church in PNG,¹² and in the follow-up process, preparing guides in *Tok Pisin* for use throughout the Mount Hagen Diocese. Her work covered strenuous rounds of in-service of church workers throughout the whole diocese.

Financial responsibility

McAuley was the home of the national leader and the sister appointed to the position of bursar. These included Sisters Nance Munro, Pat O'Shea, Clare Flinn and Julie Anne Ryan. Commencing with Nance, these sisters conducted in-service in financial matters and records,

particularly as training for the national sisters. Keeping abreast of technology and financial practice is a difficult task in today's world, and the sisters have at times sought consultations with the financial managers of the Divine Word Missionaries, whose provincial house was in Mount Hagen. In particular, these were Father Kevin Cantwell, Brother Damian Lunders and Father Stephan Gerdes.

Significant comings and goings

McAuley House holds many memories as the pivot of Mercy connections, once stretching west to Enga, north to Wewak and Aitape, east to Simbu, Goroka, Madang, New Britain and New Ireland, and south to Port Moresby and Australia. Many were the arrivals and departures of the national leader following these routes on road and air journeys on pastoral visits to the sisters. The leaders recall that some of these were joyous occasions, particularly the religious ceremonies of the indigenous sisters and the jubilee celebrations of the Australian sisters, while others were times of gripping sorrow, because of serious illness or accidents involving the sisters, or death of family members of the Australian and indigenous sisters. The closure of communities was a particularly onerous duty.

Times of great rejoicing have been the setting out and safe return of some of the indigenous sisters as they did the 'Walking with Catherine' retreat at Mercy International Centre, deepening their mercy spirituality at Catherine's House of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin. Two long overseas journeys were to Peru with the international Mercy formation personnel, investigating the essential place of indigenous cultures in religious life and ministry. The first of these was by Sister Theresia Nakankwien, who was a member of the international planning group preparing for the meeting in Peru in 2000. Theresia was rigorously and successfully coached in the ways of international flights by Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy within the confines of Brisbane International airport! The second was when Sisters Helen O'Brien, Theresa Nakankwien and Theresa Boyek set out to share the experience and issues of cultural learning in formation with Mercy Sisters in cross-cultural communities throughout the world. Other significant occasions have been the sisters' forging links through the Mercy Pacific ventures, connecting with the sisters from Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Guam, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia. When Sister Julie Anne Ryan, who had been financial administrator for eight years (1999-2006), returned to Australia, the sisters continued the financial management with the periodic help of a general overseer. In this role Sister Gwen Garland of the previous Institute Team became a welcome visitor to McAuley from time to time.

Lived experience of Melanesian Mercy

All of the professed sisters have had experience of living in community with expatriate and national sisters. They have taken part in the Assemblies which have guided the development of PNG Mercy. The national Leader, Sister Mariska Kua (2003-2007) provides an insight into the ideal of living 'Melanesian mercy'.

Coming to Holy Trinity in 2004 with Angie, Sophie and Schola was my first experience of living in a fully Melanesian Mercy community because all my religious life I've lived in a mixed community with Australian, Irish and PNG sisters. My previous experience of living has been very enriching and has broadened my whole being and understanding

of what living with people of other cultures and backgrounds, and also my own background, can bring to community. That taught me a lot and prepared me to fit into this fully Melanesian community.

I don't think that Melanesian community, although it is good, is the answer to living Melanesian Mercy. Perhaps I should explain. I find there is value in living in a truly Melanesian community but I don't see how it's going to work unless Melanesian culture is blended with Mercy culture, values and traditions. Melanesian culture is very rich with its 860 languages but it has its good, which we can use, and bad also, which we can leave aside. There needs to be a balance. The Papua New Guineans are very strong in regionalism – e.g. the Tolais, the Hagens, the Sepiks – that's one of the things that is destructive. We didn't come here because we want our own culture to dominate. So if I want to live as Melanesian Mercy I have to leave some of my own culture on the side. Melanesian Mercy has to be based on the spirituality of Catherine, because we all feel we were called by God to follow Mercy spirituality and we have to work towards that. We entered the Sisters of Mercy in answer to a call to be Mercy in PNG – together, not individually. So we use our gifts and talents as a gift to the community. We are called by the Holy Spirit into a certain group that is there to affirm and support each of us to carry out our call and make it work, believing that each is called to be a Melanesian Mercy woman for all people.¹³



McAULEY HOUSE – MOUNT HAGEN

Theresa Boyek
Clare Flinn
Maryanne Kolkia
Joan MacGinley
Agnes Murphy
Helen O'Brien
Sophie Samiak
Patricia O'Shea

Schola Fakiwi
Catherine Jambet
Veronica Lokalyo
Nance Munro
Theresia Nakankwien
Julie Anne Ryan
Maura O'Shaughnessy
Philomena Waira

MERCY LEADERSHIP TEAMS

1981-1984

Helen O'Brien (Leader), Clare Gilchrist, (Vicar) Margaret Bubb, Julie Anne Ryan, Val Cervetto. Josette McDonell replaced Sister Clare Gilchrist when she went on leave.

1985-1987

Helen O'Brien (Leader), Clare Gilchrist, Cephass Philben, Joan MacGinley, Clare Flinn, and Julie Anne Ryan (Substitute).

1988-1992

Joan MacGinley (Leader), Cynthia Griffin (Vicar), Marie Murphy, Moira Cleary, Pat O'Shea and Ann Hook (Substitute). Ann Hook replaced Marie Murphy at the beginning of 1990. Irene Callanan replaced Moira Cleary, who left for Australia due to ill health.

1993-1997

Maura O'Shaughnessy (Leader), Helen O'Brien (Vicar), Theresia Nakankwien, Anne Frances Carroll and Jennifer Bailey.

1997-2002

Helen O'Brien (Leader), Mariska Kua (Vicar), Irene Masterson, Veronica Lokalyo, Sophie Samiak and Teresa Flaherty.

2003-2007

Mariska Kua (Leader), Angeline Singiat (Vicar), Julie Anne Ryan, Theresa Boyek and Agnes Murphy. Petronia Gawi replaced Julie Anne Ryan in 2006 when she returned to Australia.



CATHERINE'S MELANESIAN DAUGHTERS – CROSSING STRANDS

From their first years in PNG, Sisters of Mercy showed a deep consciousness of the call to religious life of indigenous women. They showed this by their readiness to assist in the development of the indigenous religious orders. Significant examples of this have been given. In the Wewak Diocese, from the first days at Kunjingini and Torembl, the sisters worked in collaboration with the Rosary Sisters, who later requested Sister Maureen Grant to be their formation mistress at the novitiate on Mushu Island (1974). Once their congregation was firmly established, Archbishop Arkfeld gave approval to the Sisters of Mercy to respond positively to young women wishing to join them.¹⁴ In Goroka, the sisters encouraged Maria Ika Aum in her vocation, and Maria was accepted into the Singleton Congregation as Sister Mary Damian, making her first profession in 1967.¹⁵ Clan pressures eventually proved too powerful, and Maria made the decision to return to her family in 1971. The North Sydney Sisters of Mercy, after years of responding to the requests of young women, by encouraging them to discern their religious vocation with existing indigenous congregations, received the permission of Archbishop Bernarding to respond to young women interested in Mercy religious life.

In collaboration with other religious women

Examples of Sisters of Mercy who worked in collaboration with other religious women and men at diocesan and national levels have already been given. Sisters Margaret Bubb and RoseMary Baker worked in a year-long renewal program with the Sisters of St Therese in 1984. At the national level, starting with Sister Christine Watt (1971-1974, 1994-1995), Sisters of Mercy have taken a leading role in formation at Xavier Institute of Missiology for Women Religious of PNG and the Solomon Islands, an institute which has been at the forefront of renewal in religious life and the evolving understanding of Church and culture in the contemporary world. Other sisters were Cheryl Camp, Helen White and Julie Anne Ryan. Women (and later men) of the various indigenous congregations, as well as expatriate women religious, attended these renewal programs. Two sisters who had a particular influence in articulating the rights of indigenous women and giving them a 'voice' were Sister Marie Murphy, as Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors (1983-1989) and Sister Helen O'Brien, as Executive Secretary of the Conference of Women Religious and Federation of Religious (1990-1997).¹⁶

A momentum gathers among Mercy Sisters in PNG and Australia

When the different groups were working towards coming together in the late 1970s, the persistence of young women requesting to be Sisters of Mercy was a guiding force. The Goroka and Mount Hagen groups showed their earnest response by taking the step of joining together to form one Highlands group in 1979. They followed this up by showing their readiness to unite as a total group, proposing that Sister Cephas Philben from the dominant Brisbane group, become the overall Leader. All this was officially minuted and shared with the Australian leaders. After the 1978 National Assembly of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, the leaders there were enthusiastically responding to the movement for further unity in Australia and anxiously attempting to read the sometimes confusing signs of the times emanating from PNG.

Prompted by the developments in PNG, the Leader of the Brisbane Congregation, Sister Catherine Courtney, was asked by the other Mercy groups in Australia in 1979 to take on the responsibility of formation of the three young Papua New Guinean women who wished to join the Sisters of Mercy. This responsibility entailed the initial formation and acceptance of vows in the foreseeable future until the Sisters of Mercy PNG would have the canonical right. The level of trust in the Spirit of the different Mercy groups in PNG and in Australia is highlighted by the fact that the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (ISMA) did not come into being until December 1981.

After a retreat together in the Highlands, the three young women, Petronia, Veronica and Theresia, were guided during their postulancy at Yarpas, by Sister Irene Callanan. The three were accepted as postulants in 1980 by Sister Anne McLay, a member of the Brisbane Leadership Team. Anne was one of the key writers of the proposed Constitutions which had been revised in the light of Vatican II to suit the ideals of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia in contemporary times. This historic event was encased within another: the first combined meeting of the total group of Sisters of Mercy in the country.

Novitiate Training in PNG

When the formation of indigenous members was first considered by the sisters, the decisive step was made to have the novitiate training in PNG rather than in Australia because there was a concern to foster 'Melanesian Mercy' among the sisters. This was explained in Sister Stancia Cawte's visitation report to the Sisters of Mercy PNG.

This means developing an essentially Mercy way of life that is Melanesian, without imposing upon it an Australian or western character. This will require of the total group a tremendous openness and trust and a willingness to adapt, to allow growth to take place. It will also require on the part of all, especially those involved in the process of initial formation, a great sensitivity towards what is truly Mercy and truly Melanesian.¹⁷

This proposal to have the novitiate in PNG, rather than in Australia, was presented by the new PNG Leader, Sister Helen O'Brien, to the Australian leaders assembled at their national planning meeting. Helen recalls that the proposition did not meet with immediate approval. After a few anxious moments explaining the reasons of the PNG sisters' stance, there was soon general agreement that initial formation would take place on PNG soil!

The Novitiate begins in Wewak

The site chosen for the new novitiate, Catherine's House, was on the campus of St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi. This offered the benefit of proximity or contact with other Mercy communities in the diocese. It was also close to the Rosary Sisters, and in keeping with the relationship that had developed, both groups combined for the basic formation program. Religious priests of the Divine Word Missionaries were on hand to offer their theological and pastoral expertise.

Thus, the novitiate opened in 1982 with Sister Ursula Gilbert (who had taught at Faniufa and St Mary's in Goroka) as Novice Mistress, and Petronia Gawi as the first novice. A year later,

Theresia Gongi and Veronica Lokalyo followed. Sister Elizabeth Miller, the Goroka foundress, joined the community to offer a gentle presence and the wisdom of her years.

Early impressions

In the second year, Sister Carmel Bourke, a life-long friend and confidante of Elizabeth, was requested to spend some time in PNG enlightening and animating the sisters, both novices and expatriates, on the life and spirit of Catherine McAuley, and exploring the Mercy charism. Carmel's reflections in her report to the Institute in 1985 offer valuable insights into the early 'inside' story as she saw it.

Like all their people, they [Petronia, Vero and Theresia] have a great reverence for their ancestors and their folk traditions... They grew to love the person of Catherine McAuley, and were proud to accept her as their great 'ancestor' and guide on their journey to a Mercy vocation.

There was in the novitiate a spirit of simple hospitality and homely lifestyle, and a genuine desire not to lift those young women out of their natural sphere, or to alienate them from their own people. As they came from different regions in PNG, and spoke different tribal languages, they communicated with each other in Tok Pisin. This was the language used for most of their lectures (except mine!) and frequently for prayers and hymns in our liturgies. They were encouraged to eat their own familiar food, much of which they grew in our little garden, or bought at local markets. They enjoyed cooking a meal outdoors as they did at home in their villages... They all contributed to an atmosphere of ease and naturalness, as their religious training was being made to conform to their own living traditions.¹⁸

Other young women are drawn to vowed Mercy life

As the years passed, more young women – Mariska Kua, Theresia Nakankwien, Angela Kaima, Angeline Singiat, Helen Pili, Sophie Samiak and others – were accepted into the novitiate. The weekly routine covered the formation program, spiritual duties and mercy hospitality, maintaining the household, cooking, gardening, driving lessons, typing, correspondence lessons, visiting the sick and those in prison. The novices were also preparing for the call to ministry in the rapidly changing wider society. They faced this reality as they stood by the sisters in times of trial such as during the land dispute at Kaindi. When the sisters were forced by violent threats and physical abuse to evacuate to Yapos, the Mercy novices sought refuge and continued their program on the island of Kairiru, until peace was restored and it was safe to return.

First profession and further discernment of Mercy vocation

After completing the novitiate stage, the sisters took vows for canonically required periods as they continued to discern their vocation to Mercy life. During this time, they joined sisters in community and ministry. The majority of sisters continued their studies by correspondence with the help of expatriate sisters or by regular education programs at appropriate places (Yapos, Goroka or Simbu). Some of the young sisters had professional training as teachers, having studied at St Benedict's, Kaindi or Holy Trinity Teachers College. The nurses received their

qualifications at Aitape in the West Sepik, Vunapope in East New Britain, Det in the Southern Highlands, or Lemakot in New Ireland. The catechists and pastoral workers completed their training programs at the Catechist Training Centre, Pumakos, Xavier Institute or Divine Word University, Madang. Professional ministry was carried out in the country as teachers, nurses, secretaries, catechists, pastoral workers, and village and urban development workers.

Vows for life as a Sister of Mercy

As each sister successfully completed the probation stages, she prepared for life commitment at Xavier Institute. The ceremony for final vows was held within the local parish community where family and clan publicly consented to the exchange and the young woman joined a new religious family. These occasions marking the solemnity of the commitment to religious life through the making of public vows, were also unique occasions for joyful 'Melanesian' celebrations with liturgy, *singsings*,¹⁹ *mumu*²⁰ feasts, speeches, story-telling, music and drama.

Finally professed sisters continued their ongoing spiritual formation and professional development through practical courses or undergraduate or post-graduate programs within the country. Spirituality courses and special ministry courses were conducted at Xavier Institute, while professional courses were completed at the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, the Divine Word University, Madang, or Callan Services, Divine Word University (Wewak Campus). Examples of some courses conducted by the sisters include financial management by Sisters Nance Munro and Pat O'Shea and Mercy spirituality by Sister Agnes Murphy. More specialised courses and gatherings were held overseas in Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Ireland, Peru, England or the USA, and were subsidised by the Institute, the Mercy International Centre or other organisations. Highly skilled practitioners and retreat directors from overseas came by invitation to PNG for spirituality and ministry. While most of these were from Australia, including Sisters Carmel Bourke, Veronica Lawson, Margaret Bubb, Bernadette Eckersley, Helen Densley, Margie Abbott and others, three Sisters of Mercy came from USA – Sisters Sheila Carney, Virginia Froele and Frances Repka. Two of the consultants from Australia were Canon Lawyers – Pauline Smith of the Institute Leadership Team and Monica Stallard, the Brisbane Congregational Leader.

Links with Australia and Mercy Pacific

There have been links between Australian and PNG sisters in formation. On separate occasions, novices from Melbourne and Cairns, led by Sister Kaye Evans, and those from Adelaide, led by Sister Patricia Pak Poy, have shared part of the formation program with their Melanesian sisters. Links with the Pacific Islands' sisters were fostered also through the Mercy Pacific programs which were instigated and financed by the Institute. These programs exposed sisters to the richness of the diversity of cultures within the region, but also to the threats of unequal modernisation, global warming and advancing globalisation influenced by external and internal economic and political forces. Sisters of Mercy from Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Guam, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia took part in these Mercy Pacific programs.

Further international links have been cemented through the combined formation meetings and, in particular, through the formalising of the Institute's Formation Policy for Australian, Papua New Guinean and Pakistani New Members in 2003.

Sister Philomena Waira offers her impressions of the New Members Gathering in Sydney:

The sisters at the New Members Gathering came from different parts of Australia and included some Vietnamese sisters. Although in PNG we have our different languages and cultures it was a new thing to see other sisters from different cultures coming together. One thing we have is our charism and one spirituality in Catherine McAuley and we enjoyed our time together.

The Aboriginal ladies talked about the schools and racism. We talked deeply about walking with the same spirituality of Mercy. Catherine had this strong desire to be with the people, and to educate women. She had that sense of justice and desire to help women, and others too. She felt for the people. Even though we were strangers I found hospitality and friendliness among the sisters and we all felt at home. I've found this in PNG among our sisters, but also in other countries: the spirit that Sisters of Mercy still carry on.²¹

Responsibility for Formation of new members

After some years, it was considered time for experienced PNG sisters to take over responsibility for recruitment and initial and ongoing formation. After a period of training and accompaniment by expatriate formators, Sister Theresia Nakankwien was appointed the first Formation Director. PNG sisters took on the task of communicating with young women interested in religious life, through vocations promotion, accompanying postulants in their first steps towards religious life, and taking joint responsibility for the junior professed program. However, there have been gaps in personnel due to the shortage of qualified sisters to fill the shoes of the expatriate sisters.

In 2002, the small number of two Mercy novices joined the Presentation novitiate at Aitape with Sister Theresa Boyek as assistant. This was a move reminiscent of Catherine herself and the early founders being formed in religious life in the Presentation tradition. Sadly, this move meant that the long established practice of collaboration in initial formation with the Rosary Sisters was to come to an end. However, the walls and grounds of the former Wewak novitiate were now to be used as a study centre for further education of women, including Mercy Sisters and interested young women, as Sister Kaye Bolwell conducted secondary lessons at the newly established Mercy Educational Centre. The sisters' recently acquired second property at Coolock, finalised in Goroka in 2003, became the new house of formation.

Vocations promotion

Indigenous sisters have taken on responsibility for vocations promotion and supervision of postulants. Sister Scholastica Fakiwi commented on what was involved in contacting the families of interested young women, using her journey to the Sandaun Province as an example:

I'm doing vocational promotion – going out to visit interested young women. When I was in Wewak last year I went to Nuku. It was really something – when we had a breakdown we had to spend a whole night on the road. Then we had a 14 hours 30 minutes walk. I thought the village was near, but it turned out to be a long, long way. First we stayed with an old woman, and then we walked on to Kunni's village. That walk especially made me very hungry, and very thirsty, but in my mind I was not complaining. I felt it was my responsibility to go there and get to know where this person was from – in a way I could not know from the letters she had written. I spent 2 weeks there with Kunni's mother, brother and family. We prayed and we shared together, I talked about Kunni's program and they were all happy.

That was my first experience and after doing that, I now know that if I go myself, I can really see and know the young woman's situation. There was no transport, and the road was terrible, but I felt I was doing something worthwhile in Mercy mission. Somehow I was happy with the trip after all!²²

Overcoming difficulties to enter religious life

The Sisters of Mercy made it a policy that suitable young women seeking entry into the congregation reach acceptable secondary education standards. This posed no difficulty for those already in a profession, but the majority faced the experience common to so many girls throughout PNG. Boys in the family were given preference in schooling, and girls were denied access to secondary education through a rigorous selection system. Typical challenges of completing secondary education by CODE studies were voiced by two young women who entered the Sisters of Mercy at the same time: Sister Theresa Boyek from Kairiru in the Wewak coastal area, and Sister Claudia from Enga in the Highlands area. Despite difficulties, they persevered and acquired their professional qualifications for ministry.

Theresa Boyek:

When I was a little girl in school at St Martin's Community School, and Sister Misericordia was head teacher there it struck me that she was so very simple and gentle. That was when I got interested in Mercy. But I missed out on High School and finished in 1974. When I left school I stayed at home and used to bring some fruits to Sister Misericordia and would go each Sunday to Mass and see her after Mass. Once, Sister Misericordia told me there was space for me at Kaindi, to work with Sister Val as a domestic trainee, to learn how to cook and to help the brothers, sisters and lecturers at St. Benedict's, Kaindi.

I came there in 1982 and worked with Sister Val and with five girls and I finished at the beginning of 1985. Because I was very interested, the sisters asked me to do some CODE Studies at the beginning of 1984 with Sister Nell Callaghan. I stayed with my cousin there, and I went to St John's every morning where Sister Nell was helping me with my studies. I took Grade 7 Maths and English at that time.

In 1986 the sisters asked if I could do my Grade 8 full time at Yarapos until the end of 1988, when I completed Grade 10. It was hard but I wanted it. I saved my money when I was working with the sisters, and I used that to pay for my school fees. After completing

Grade 10, I stayed at home for six months, then I became a postulant in June 1989 with Sister Irene Callanan and Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer at Catherine's House for a month, then with Sister Val and Sister Margarita at Kunjingini.

I attended Bible School with Margarita there, and during my experience there I admired the way they prayed together, shared stories and ate together. I witnessed their life in prayer. When I sensed it was time for prayer, for Rosary, I would look at the watch and see that it was time for Rosary. Though the sisters were working, the time had come for them to commit themselves to prayer and they would do it. At the end of that time I went home for discernment, and I wanted to take another step – to become a novice. I wrote a letter to Sister Joan and they accepted me as a novice and I joined the other two Engan women and we started our novitiate in 1990. I was professed on 15th January, 1992.²³

Theresa later qualified in secretarial studies and for a time provided secretarial services at Mercy College Yarpas. Having successfully completed relevant programs at Xavier Institute, Theresa also competently took responsibility for the spiritual formation of novices. In her ministry at Coolock House Theresa introduced many unskilled women to valuable domestic and personal development skills. In 2006, Theresa joined the Mercy Works project in Goroka.

Claudia Apalenda:



My family was way up there at Kandep in Enga, and we never saw any sisters. When I heard their name I just came and asked Bishop Hermann Raich SVD. He said that if you want to try your vocation as a sister you could write to any congregation; and that is what I did. When I saw the sisters – Mercies and Holy Spirits – in their uniforms they looked nice, they would fly along like angels and I admired them.

I completed my primary school in my own place in Mang-Kandep at the end of 1974. There were only two girls in the class and as the best boys were selected for high school, the rest of us had to stay at home. I worked at home with my parents. In 1982 a German SVD, Brother Karl, encour-

aged me to enrol in CODE studies and helped me complete Grade 7. Then I went to Sister Margaret Shakeshaft at Par and continued CODE as far as Grade 9. I then continued with Sister Helen McDonell at Holy Trinity in 1985. The sisters sent me down to Banz Vocational School, and I thought we were going to do full time secondary lessons in CODE but instead we had to do garden work, and if I had been at home I would have been doing gardening. I wrote a letter to my parish priest Father Werner and he drove me back home to Kandep. At times I wrote to Margaret and went to see her in Par. I also sat for a CODE exam there where Margaret had other CODE students.

I wanted to join the Mercy Sisters and I wrote to them, but they said I was not ready. So I said, "Forget about it. I'm going to give up now". A short time later Sister Joan McGinley and Sister Vero Lokalyo came to my village to see my parents and to invite me for a Vocations Weekend. After this they asked: "Do you want to come and stay with us?" So after

struggling all those years wondering if I would have to be a grandmother before becoming a sister, at last I was accepted to become a postulant!²⁴ When I was a postulant in Mount Hagen in 1989 Sister Pat O'Shea helped me to complete my last subject. At last I had my high school certificate and was on my way to being a Sister of Mercy.

As a Sister of Mercy, Claudia completed qualifications in Community Health at the Det School of Nursing in the Southern Highlands, and has since been a health care worker within the Catholic Health Services. She has completed further training with Callan Services in specialised skills, such as 'Eye and Ear Care' to diagnose, treat and refer people with sight and hearing impairment. In 2007, Claudia was a pioneer member of the Mercy Works Project in Mount Hagen.

Companions on the journey in the novitiate

There was a deliberate intention not to have the novitiate isolated from ordinary life. Hence the sisters were involved in hospitality, Mercy ministry and engagement with the surrounding Mercy communities. It was the custom to have another sister in the novitiate community who was involved in outside ministry. One such sister was Sister Nell Callaghan, who was the Bishop's secretary and carried out her duties each day at Wirui. Nell comments on her position at the novitiate.

I was in a somewhat unique position there – I was not the Novice Mistress, nor her Assistant. I was not officially teaching the novices, I merely lived with them, working away from the novitiate in the Bishop's office in Wewak, by day and returning each night.

But it was during these last few years that I came to know these young women and to experience the beautiful people they are – I really felt the power of their prayer, their deep faith, the honest response to God's Call, and their dedication to their work in striving to become what they felt God was calling them to be.

It was here that I shared some of their difficulties and saw how earnestly they were striving to achieve their goal – difficulties experienced and overcome in studies, personality clashes, prayer life, and misunderstandings – and I saw them work through their problems and 'smile again'. But I will always hold as precious, the privilege I had to be there with them offering simply a 'shoulder to cry on', a 'listening ear', a 'helping hand'.

It will be a long time before I forget those beautiful moments sitting on the back steps talking over our day with the dog and cat beside us; telling stories and sampling our cooking in hauswin, and all the time trying to show them how much I cared about them while they, in their turn, taught me how very much they cared for and loved me as they taught me in their quiet, gentle way much about prayer and life.²⁵

In the 20 years from the beginning of the novitiate in Catherine's House in 1982, to its close in 2002, more than 30 young women discerned their Mercy vocation. Of these, nine decided not to pursue the Mercy way of religious life during the stage of temporary vows, and one after final vows. These live out their Mercy tradition as well educated, professionally qualified and influential lay women.

A revered pioneer, Sister Cephias, ponders on the past - and the future

Sister Cephias Philben came among the founding group to Kunjingini in 1957, and was in later years, local Superior at Torembi. After returning to Australia and overcoming serious illness, Cephias became co-ordinator for the eastern region of the Brisbane Congregation, which included pastoral care of their sisters in PNG. On her return to PNG, she was engaged in pastoral work on the New Image of the Parish (NIP) Team at Kunjingini, before holding responsible positions as Assistant Novice Formator and Formator of Junior Professed. Sister Cephias reflected on special moments in her life in PNG and her hopes for the sisters at the 2002 Assembly, the group of sisters that elected the first indigenous sister to leadership of the Sisters of Mercy PNG. The words of the second paragraph are particularly apt as the Sisters of Mercy approach their first Chapter as an autonomous Region (2007).

Within the 21 years I spent in PNG special moments were plentiful. I would like, however, to mention the moment I was chosen to be part of the group that left for Wewak in 1957 with its three week sea voyage and the entrance into a country inhabited by people who were so different from Australians. The long years teaching in Kunjingini, Torembi and Ulupu prepared me for the rewarding years of pastoral work where the giving of village

retreats brought me into the midst of the little community groups where I would spend three or four days, experiencing village life and sharing the lives of the parents of the children I had taught. In the latter part of my time in PNG, I was called to work directly with our young women who had entered the Mercy novitiate. Living with them, assisting in their formation and preparing them to take vows was, for me, a very special time when I was able to see, at first hand, the fruits of Mercy influence in the blossoming of faith in the young women. Back in 1957, they had been experiencing their first days at school just like the little ones I had taught in Kunjingini.

Today, these same women are being called to take the spirit of Mercy to wherever the Spirit may lead them. I hope and pray they will go [to the Assembly] with minds open to the Holy Spirit. Just as in my time I had no idea of the culture or customs of those to whom I was called to minister, so they may feel inadequate to take up the spirit of Mercy in this new millennium and run with it because everything is constantly changing; but I see that these sisters are conscious of many important principles to be kept in mind... My hope is that they will ever keep in mind Catherine's legacy to the Institute, i.e. being one in heart and mind, and listening to God's wisdom, as revealed by the sisters in Assembly, they will go forward into a new spring.²⁶



Sister Cephias leaving PNG.



FORMATION TEAMS

CATHERINE'S HOUSE COOLOCK HOUSE

Formators and Assistants in Formation

Ursula Gilbert	Cephas Philben
Maura O'Shaughnessy	Ann O'Regan
Ann O'Regan	Theresia Nakankwien
Theresia Nakankwien	Theresa Boyek
Jennifer Bailey	Theresa Boyek
Helen White	Catherine Jambet

Novitiate Community Companions

Elizabeth Miller, Francis Readman, Nell Callaghan.

Formators of Junior Professed

Cephas Philben, Helen O'Brien, Margaret Shakeshaft,
Carmel Martin and Helen White.

Caretaking Catherine's House

Margaret Shakeshaft and RoseMary Baker continued their regular ministries.



CHRIST'S MISSION OF MERCY AND JUSTICE – EXTENDING THE BILUM

As they responded in their call to mission in the various dioceses, the Sisters of Mercy adapted to ever changing circumstances. A sketch of the amazing reality of the Mercy vision captured by their students, colleagues and other associates completes the story.

Declining numbers of Australian Sisters

The number of 44 expatriate sisters in 1981 was reduced in stages to nine in 2006 and eight in 2007, most sisters having returned to Australia for reasons of alternate ministry or retirement from active ministry. Some sisters suffered ill health or experienced violence, physical abuse and the sustaining of permanent injury in the declining social situation. Eighteen sisters have since served on their Congregational Leadership Teams, while a number have worked as members of the overseas Mercy Refugee Service, or with refugees in Australia or in the Aboriginal ministry.

The mutual exchange dimension in mission

Sister Helen McDonell, a pioneer and long-serving missionary educator in Enga, Mount Hagen and Wewak, voiced a loving exchange experienced by many of the sisters. "We gave what we knew; and we received much more than we gave." These words imply a powerful and loving exchange. The sisters had the determination, energy and drive to do and pass on what they could. In their relationships they learnt from the people and were profoundly changed by them. Many sisters hold in their memory lasting appreciation of their Melanesian friends, rich in their diverse cultures, with a wondrous ability to celebrate faith and life in liturgy, ritual and singing. They recall instances of their extreme generosity, patient endurance of suffering, their lack of this world's goods and conveniences, and wonder at their gift for languages, story and drama. The natural beauty of the country has a special hold on their hearts.

At the same time, the sisters were aware that in the day-to-day carrying out of ministry in the Melanesian context, they had their share of personal limitations, weakness and uncertainty, cultural misunderstanding, and difficulty with the language. Many of the earlier sisters did not have the opportunity for mission studies that became available to sisters in the 1970s. Yet, the sisters' overall recognition of such shortcomings was balanced with a realistic and grateful appraisal, acknowledging what they had gained from contact and interaction with the people in Melanesia.

The sisters were also sustained through encouragement and challenge in myriad ways in their friendships with one another, mission personnel and colleagues. There is no doubt of the immeasurable value of overseas material and financial support. Also immeasurable was the prayerful and emotional support, particularly, but not only, from Australia and Ireland, of family members, Mercy sisters, friends, priests, religious and bishops.

Signs of diminishment

Meanwhile, the overall signs of diminishment were becoming all too obvious. Because of insufficient numbers, the sisters had to leave several well established communities and ministries in the 1990s – Kairiru (1970-1993), Kondiu (1974-1990), Dreikir (1979-1992), and Aitape

(1977-1992). In all these places, PNG sisters had lived and ministered side-by-side with expatriate sisters, and in almost all cases, were among the last ones to pack up, close the doors and leave for good. Despite the sadness of these closures, there was joy in the accomplishment of the localisation process and empowerment of the indigenous lay people, and celebration for the years of Mercy ministry by both expatriate and indigenous sisters.

Two closures which have previously been mentioned – Pumakos and Neragaima – however, were traumatic and especially reminiscent of Catherine McAuley's claims: "We are founded on the Cross now indeed" and "Thus we go on... flourishing in the midst of the cross..."²⁷. After the whole mission station at Pumakos, including the sisters' convent of 26 years was burnt down in tribal fighting, Sisters Jennifer Bailey and Clare Gilchrist started again at Wanepap, the neighbouring mission station. Joined by Sister Claudia Apalenda from Enga and other PNG sisters, this small group offered a sign of hope and unity in troubled times. When the two expatriate sisters eventually left to return to Australia, the indigenous sisters continued the ministry. For a few years, the PNG sisters carried out their ministry of health, including HIV/AIDS awareness, and education at Neragaima (1999-2002), but were forced to leave after enduring a prolonged series of violent attacks as they travelled on the roads.

The gradual diminishment became evident as one Assembly followed another, and the group of greying heads was noticeably smaller each time. The mentors were being replaced by a younger generation of PNG sisters. Yet, both groups were putting their energies, for whatever time was available, into preparing for the future when responsibility for the autonomous congregation would change hands.

Working together - speaking out against injustice

Together with the people, sisters in town and rural areas faced the consequences of a deteriorating social situation. While the causes constitute too complex a matter to unravel here, some likely reasons are the clash between traditional and western ways, the widening gap between youth and elders, the lack of opportunities for education and work, poverty, civil unrest and the inability of the police or village elders to maintain law and order.

Travel on the roads became increasingly dangerous as expatriate and indigenous sisters, along with their companions in ministry, suffered from life-threatening and brutal incidents. Daily life for women in general was hard and dangerous. In seeking justice and peace, the indigenous sisters united with religious women of the Wewak Diocese. They joined in, and later organised protest rallies against the violent attacks on women in the area. Similarly, indigenous sisters added their signatures to those of the expatriates in letters to the Prime Minister and in the newspapers protesting the lawlessness, tribal fighting and attacks on women and nurses in Enga. Ex-students of the sisters at Yrapos and other Mercy places, likewise, wrote letters of protest to the media against physical violence to the staff and threats to close the school. The weight of their 'voice' in protest and prayer was a great support to the sisters and helped towards an eventual easing of the crisis.²⁸

The Sisters of Mercy Mission Statement

In the face of increased violence in society, the sisters committed themselves to a non-violent stance. They expressed this common purpose in a Mission Statement, accepted at the 1997 Assembly in Alexishafen.²⁹

We Sisters of Mercy recognise and respond to our call to empower women and to witness to non-violence personally, in community and in ministry.

We stand beside the women of Papua New Guinea, particularly those who suffer from injustice, oppression and violence. We seek to build up their self-confidence and to help them value and appreciate themselves. We are concerned for the mutual development of women and men in families, Church and society.

We need to develop the skills required to help us to witness to Mercy that does Gospel justice. We therefore seek opportunities to develop personal skills of learning to cope, counselling, management and conflict resolution. These skills will enable us to take more positive steps to develop non-violent ways of living, to empathise with others, to stand in solidarity with women, the oppressed and victims in society, to raise consciousness in our ministries and to take public action against oppression and violence.

This Mission Statement emphasised a focus that had grown out of the collective experience of the sisters in their ministry in PNG. It was to be a guiding force as sisters engaged in new ministries that were evolving to meet changing needs.

The Australian sisters of the PNG Region in 2007- adapting to new patterns in ministry

Working alongside the national sisters and scattered throughout different parts of the country are eight expatriate sisters – four 'veterans' and four more recent arrivals.

The four 'veteran' missionaries are Sisters Maura O'Shaughnessy (1971), Joan MacGinley (1978), Helen White (1978) and Agnes Murphy (1981). Like so many expatriate and national sisters, they have faced in their mission lives the 'creative tension' of responding to competing demands of commitment to community and ministry over decades in PNG. Finding the right balance between community and ministry is not an easy task. Yet the summaries that follow underscore the efforts of each of these sisters to achieve this fine balance in their lives.

Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy, a member of the Brisbane Congregation and originally from Ireland, arrived in pre-independence times in 1971. She has ministered four times at Yarpas, as teacher and as Principal, resided as a core member of the 'Lait Blong Moning' community

(while teaching at Yarapos), taught at Maprik High School (while living at Kunjingini), taught twice at St Xavier's, Kairiru, served as Formation Mistress and also as Leader of the Sisters of Mercy PNG. For the last eight years, Maura, after undergoing studies and specific skills training, has been involved in HIV/AIDS education awareness and counselling. During the first year, she worked with Wewak Callan Services, but since then has been with the Provincial Government as Co-ordinator of HIV/AIDS Care and Counselling at the Sepik Centre for Hope. In this capacity, Maura continues in the tradition of localisation, assisting in the training of national educators and counsellors, and leading by example in the arduous bush patrols throughout the East Sepik Province.³⁰



Sister Joan MacGinley was recruited from Brisbane in 1978 to teach at the Minor Seminary on Kairiru, later moving to Yarapos where she was Deputy Principal for a time. Joan was elected as Leader of the Sisters of Mercy PNG from 1988 to 1992. During her administration, McAuley House was purchased for the sisters. Having become interested in Theology while carrying out pastoral work on Kairiru, Joan left PNG for a sabbatical to complete a Bachelor of Theology at Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne in 1993.



From 1995 to 1997, Joan was Directress of the Kunjingini Bible School and a core member of the Diocesan Team of Pastoral Animation. Residing at McAuley and then at Holy Trinity in her first years on the National Team of the Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World, Joan eventually moved to their new Centre at the Mount Hagen diocesan headquarters at Rebiamul in December, 2001. By 2007 the Movement for a Better World had worked in five dioceses in PNG, with two more recently asking for assistance in diocesan pastoral planning and the promotion of communitarian spirituality.

Sister Helen White was initiated into Mercy mission life and ministry at Mercy College, Yarapos, in 1978, before beginning a long-standing commitment to tertiary education, in various dioceses. Helen was lecturer for three years at Kaindi (1979-1983), two years at Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana, while also on the staff at Xavier Institute (1983-1984), then seven years at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen (1987-1991) (1997-1999).



Helen's expertise was valuable in the drive for localisation, the development of relevant teacher education programs and

the encouragement of female staff. Helen was also a key figure as the young national sisters took their place in community. Unfortunately, Helen's time at Holy Trinity was interrupted by the onset of a serious illness, leading to an urgent medical evacuation to Brisbane. Recovering in health, Helen carried out ministries with Sudanese refugees in Uganda and at Mercy International Centre in Dublin before responding to a request in 2003 to assist in the formation of PNG sisters, as a guide and companion. Since 2004, Helen has been Formator at Coolock House, Goroka, the Formation House for the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea.



Sister Agnes Murphy arrived in PNG in 1982 to serve on the academic staff of Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mt Hagen. She then spent four years at Aiyura National High School, but in her final year, suffered serious illness. Upon returning to Holy Trinity, Agnes was eventually asked to take on the role of Deputy Principal from 1995 to 1999. It was then that Agnes developed a

keen interest in PNG Mercy history and began to build up the sisters' archival history.

Agnes completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and began a Masters in Pastoral Studies which she completed through distance education. In 2000, Agnes carried out her shortest ministry in PNG as Academic Registrar of Divine Word University before responding to the 1998 Assembly recommendation to try and retain a Mercy presence and influence at Yarapos. Since then, in her role as Principal, Agnes has worked untiringly for this and, in addition, for localisation and the improvement of facilities. Yarapos now caters for upper secondary education of girls in the East Sepik Province. Agnes is currently serving on the Leadership Team.

Creative tension of community and mission

Maura, Joan, Helen and Agnes had their ways of adjusting to the creative tension of religious life and ministry. They also showed their preparedness, energy and readiness to hand over and start again – a characteristic of so many expatriate sisters, whether they stayed for a long or a short time in PNG. Many of the indigenous sisters have shown their willingness to commit themselves to the call of the Spirit to Mercy religious life (and responsibility and ownership of this) and mission. With the passing years, responses of the national sisters to the 'creative tension' will be different and new, according to culture, personality, health, age and other considerations – and that belongs to the story of the future!

The new contingent from Australia

One of the new contingent, Sister Kaye Bolwell, has managed the Mercy Education Centre at the former novitiate, Catherine's House, since 2003³¹. Sister Maureen Sexton (later joined by Sister Catherine Corbett) has been involved with refugees at Kiunga through the Mercy Works project since 2003³². Sister Gaye Lennon leads the Mercy Works PNG projects in Goroka and Mount Hagen³³. Others making periodic visits for specialist ministries are Sisters Gwen Garland³⁴, Peta Goldberg³⁵ and Patricia Weekes.³⁶

Vowed Mercy women of the PNG Region

Owning their deep call to Mercy, the indigenous sisters have learnt the ways of following in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley from the Australian sisters. They have stood together in 'good times and bad', in 'joys and sorrows'.³⁷ The indigenous sisters have endured the heat and malaria, the earthquakes and the floods; they have walked long distances and faced dangers on the seas, rivers, swamps, mountain tracks and roads. They have suffered from violence and remained to stand in solidarity with those in affliction. They have worked and studied hard to get the qualifications that have enabled them to fulfil the ministry dearest to their heart. Like their Australian sisters, they know their feet of clay as they face limitations, failure and human weakness. They go on like those before them, while daring to own their truth, conscious of the divine presence, and guarding in trust Catherine's words: "There has been a most marked Providential guidance which the want of prudence – vigilance – or judgment has not impeded – and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God."³⁸

The indigenous sisters have held onto their bond with the Australian sisters in many ways – by entering into their celebratory jubilee liturgies in cultural dance and *bilas*,³⁹ by communication with those who have returned to Australia, by remembering each by name in the yearly cycle of prayer in the novitiate. In lighter moments, gathered around the peace of the dying embers of an evening *mumu* or barbecue, they have kept their memory alive in story or drama by recalling past memorable incidents – some being more complimentary than others!

Different times – new challenges

The vowed Mercy women of today adjust to the changing needs as did the expatriate sisters before them. They are women of spiritual vision who are well educated, qualified practitioners carrying out the ministries of formal education, teacher education, tertiary distance education, nursing and health education, pastoral work in town and rural areas, HIV/AIDS counselling, rehabilitation and education, secretarial management, hospitality and domestic management, and development work with women. They interpret these ministries in the light of their deep understanding of the culture and their people. While most live in small Mercy communities, a minority live in inter-religious or inter-denominational settings. All seek to create bonds of closeness and collaboration with those in shared ministry and through their interdependence with one another in the Mercy family of the PNG Region.

Sister Catherine Jambet commented on the contemporary approach to ministry:

There is a lot of challenge in society now. When the Sisters of Mercy first came, a big need was for education, health and pastoral care. They are the traditional ministries and they are still there, but according to changes in time, new ministries are needed now.

Today's issues are: poverty, which is different from before, new sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS, more squatter settlements, youth problems and wandering youths, shortage of job opportunities and unemployment. There is a need for skills training and pastoral care of youth and those in the settlements. Basic skills like sewing and cooking are needed

Is it important to find some ways of helping people to help themselves? Yes, we can't feed them all ourselves. It is a big Mercy challenge to help people be aware of possible ways to help themselves, and to provide places that could enable them to be self-reliant. Be-

cause of this we appreciate the opportunity given to us to develop the skills of the sisters in Kiunga and those used in the Mercy Works Jubilee project.⁴⁰

The most recent development, incorporating these principles outlined by Sister Cathy Jambet, occurred in response to the request of the Archbishop of Mount Hagen, Douglas Young, SVD, for the Sisters of Mercy to extend the Mercy Works PNG project in his Archdiocese. In April, 2007 the project was launched under Sister Gaye Lennon's leadership. The Mount Hagen Co-ordinator is Mrs Louise Parinjo, a former head teacher, who studied at Yarpas and did her teacher education at Holy Trinity Teachers College. On the staff is Sister Claudia Apalenda, an experienced nurse, qualified in Community Health, and in specialised courses to detect and refer people with hearing impairment.

Seeking mercy and justice with others

At this time of the 50 years' celebrations of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG, there have been countless remarkable instances of gratitude on the part of the people, expressions which were very touching and visible for anyone to see. These came to light in conversations with people of all ages, from diverse walks of life, and from different corners of the country. These men and women included representatives of teachers, nurses, secretaries, domestic workers, police officers, land owners, women leaders, community leaders, religious sisters, clergy, catechists and church leaders, all with their personal story to tell. This they proudly attributed to particular Sisters of Mercy, not only those from former times, but to the present generations of PNG sisters.

Examples have been given of the Mercy PNG links through the major Mercy establishments and connections with the sisters. From the early days, possibly even before the sisters crossed geographical boundaries within PNG, many boys and girls and young adults had already done so. The sisters encouraged them to progress to secondary school, nursing or teacher training throughout the country (or in Australia). It was also an early government practice for teachers and nurses to be appointed to different provinces throughout the country in an effort to promote national unity and identity. As professionals, these young people returned to work in their home places or other provinces. As they did so, they carried with them the love and respect of their former teachers. As students, they had captured their spirit of mercy and truth, and were among the first of many to pass this on, blending it with their own cultural values.

The number of Mercy connections throughout the country has grown. Stories of personal experiences came not only from people of mature age. A young brigade had joined their ranks, expressing words of love and appreciation for their teachers and co-workers – the present Melanesian Sisters of Mercy. The sisters who have returned to PNG for jubilees, or to reconnect with friends of former times, have soon been caught up in the generosity of PNG people, as various ones have shown their friendship, offering hospitality and transporting the Sisters in Port Moresby and the major centres during their travels.

The *bilum* of God's new creation of an autonomous region in the hands of the PNG sisters is a tribute to the fidelity of the indigenous sisters in following their Mercy call, and taking their place in compassionate ministry beside their own people. They share in the appreciation of thousands of people spread right across PNG who acknowledge that they have found spiritual nourishment and strength in following Christ, and in blending the spirit of mercy and truth with their deeply held cultural beliefs.

In the hands of the ultimate Bilum-Maker

At the end of 50 years of the presence of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG, and 25 years of Melanesian Sisters of Mercy, everyone, including companions, lay missionaries, and co-workers, can stand back and marvel at the work of the divine *Bilum-Maker*, and the part each has been called to play as 'joys and sorrows' mingled in the making of the mercy *bilum*.

Who can fathom the depths of love the Melanesian Sisters have for their own traditionally self-reliant, but struggling people, and their naturally beautiful, but impoverished country? Who can measure their desire to see justice and mercy in their land? At this time of jubilee, the PNG sisters graciously and courageously reach out to accept the strands offered them by the *Bilum-Maker* as they step out into the future as the autonomous PNG Region of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

Sister Maryanne Kolkia captures the spirit of this new stage of autonomy:

I see the Australian Mercies as putting us in a bilum, and carrying us along on their heads, up the mountains, and down the hills, in the valleys. Sometimes they put us on their laps, seeing us growing, admiring us. It gave them joy to see us growing. They taught us to walk, to stand up and do things as they once did, and, yes, they let us do it differently.

The same bilum will be there, only it will be different in a way. We will take their place, but in a different way. It is we, the PNG Mercies, that continue on with carrying the bilum up the mountains, down into the valleys. These are now different times.⁴¹

As the sisters of the PNG Region embark on that new stage, the trust, gratitude and prayer of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, Pakistan, and the rest of the Mercy world surround them.



Endnotes

- 1 This has been outlined in Chapter 2.
- 2 A native tree of precious hard wood.
- 3 This excerpt was offered in April, 2007.
- 4 Excerpt taken from the 1990 Assembly Report.
- 5 This was related by Sister Deirdre in a brief conversation, January 30, 2007.
- 6 Theresia offered these reflections in an interview in May, 2005.
- 7 The official letter was read out by Institute President, Sister Nerida Tinkler, to the sisters assembled at the Jubilee Celebrations in Goroka, May 2006.
- 8 Taken from personal reflections in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- 9 Tok Pisin term for outside shelter for cooking and socialising.
- 10 The woven traditional dress, made up of single strands falling from the waist and worn by females.
- 11 The traditional drum.
- 12 This involved the whole Catholic Church in PNG and took for the form of involvement of the Self-Study of the 1970s.
- 13 Offered in an interview in May, 2006.
- 14 This has been recorded in previous chapters.
- 15 Recorded in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.
- 16 Father Kevin Hennessy CP, a former President of the Federation of Religious of PNG and Solomon islands, emphasised Sister Helen's influence in this regard in a conversation, May, 2006.
- 17 Delivered at the Assembly in Goroka in 1981.
- 18 Sister Carmel's Report to the Institute in 1985.
- 19 Traditional dancing to the beat of the drum.
- 20 This applies to vegetables or meat, wrapped in leaves and cooked on hot stones in a pit.
- 21 The New Members Gathering of Representatives from Australia, Pakistan and PNG took place, April 19-25, 2005.
- 22 From an Interview in June, 2006.
- 23 From an interview with Sister Theresa Boyek in Goroka in May, 2005.
- 24 From an interview with Sister Claudia Apalenda in Wewak in May, 2005.
- 25 Taken from an account of Sister Nell Callaghan in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- 26 Taken from an account of Sister Cephas Philben in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.
- 27 Sister Bonaventure Brennan RSM, *According to Catherine: Words of Wisdom from Catherine McAuley: A Thematic Approach*, Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, 2003, p.44, p.45.
- 28 A letter to the media by Sister Rita Hassett on behalf of the Union of Women Religious of Enga, February 12, 1989, a letter to *The Independent* initiated by the sisters and written on their behalf by Father Otto Separi in 2000, and a letter by ex-Mercy students to *The Post Courier*, May 17, 2005.
- 29 This Assembly was co-facilitated by Sister Wendy Flannery, who was at the time under contract to the Bishops Conference of Oceania and later set up the Mercy Desk at the United Nations.
- 30 Interviews with Sister Maura in Wewak in 2002 and 2007.
- 31 This has been outlined in 'Brisbane Mercy Sisters to St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi (1969)' in Chapter 5.
- 32 This has been outlined in 'Diocese of Daru-Kiunga' in Chapter 9.
- 33 This has been outlined in 'A New Community in Goroka (2003) - The Third Wave' in Chapter 3.
- 34 cf Mercy Administration Centre - McAuley House.
- 35 cf Chapter 9.
- 36 cf Chapter 4: Brisbane Mercy Sisters to St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, 1969.
- 37 Sister Bonaventure Brennan RSM, *According to Catherine: Words of Wisdom from Catherine McAuley: A Thematic Approach*, 2003.
- 38 Letter to Sister M. Elizabeth Moore - St Mary Convent, Limerick on January 13, 1839, in Mary C. Sullivan, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2004, p. 179.
- 39 Word used to describe the traditional decorations.
- 40 Taken from an interview with Sister Catherine Jambet, May, 2005.
- 41 Offered in an interview by Sister Maryanne Kolkia, May, 2005.

APPENDIX 1. EVENTS THAT SHAPED THE PERIOD 1956-2006

IN GOVERNMENT

1962	Policy to use English only in formal education.
1964	First House of Assembly of Papua and New Guinea.
1971	National Teaching Service, giving teachers of the mission agencies equal salaries and status with those of the administration agency schools, and establishing national curricula.
1973	Self Government of Papua and New Guinea.
1975	Independence of Papua New Guinea.
1990	Papua New Guinea Women's Policy.
2005	Celebration of 30 years of Independence.

IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (1956 – 2006)

1957	Publication of the Grammar and Dictionary of Neo-Melanesia by Father Frank Mihalic SVD. <i>Tok Pisin</i> was widely used in teaching by Priests and Catechists, in churches and schools.
1962-65	Second Vatican Council, initiated by Pope John XXIII and concluded by Pope Paul VI. Significant reforms consisted in shifting the emphasis from a clerical model of church to the 'People of God' through building up the rights, responsibility and participation of the laity; engaging in inculturation - a process of seeking expressions of Christianity within the various cultures; celebrating the liturgy in the language of the people rather than in Latin; promoting the growth of the church through increasing local priests and religious brothers and sisters; encouraging the use of the Bible, and establishing a new and positive relationship with non-Catholic denominations and non-Christian religions.
1968	Establishment of Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service in PNG.
1971	Establishment of Xavier Institute of Missiology for Religious Women of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Renewal of Religious Life advised a total commitment to the Person of Jesus, the living out of Gospel values, and a re-focus on the charism of the Founders in meeting the needs of the modern world.
1972-75	Self-Study of the Church influencing goals of localisation and putting into practice at grassroots level the Vatican II ideal 'We are the Church.'
1984-86 1995	Visits of Pope John Paul II, and beatification of Blessed Peter to Rot, PNG martyr (1995).
1990	Catherine McAuley declared 'Venerable' by Pope John Paul II.
1998	Synod of the Catholic Bishops of Oceania.
2003-04	National Assembly of the Church in PNG.

APPENDIX 2. MERCY FOUNDATIONS AND COMMUNITIES IN PNG

MERCY FOUNDATIONS FROM AUSTRALIA TO PNG

Dates	Place	Bishop	Leader PNG	Leader Australia
1956	Goroka	Adolf Noser Madang	Elizabeth Miller	Mother Patricia O'Neill Canberra (Union)
1957	Kunjungini	Leo Arkfeld Wewak	Francis Regis Everingham	Mother Damian Duncombe Brisbane (Federation)
1958-1974	Torembi	Leo Arkfeld Wewak	Joseph Xavier	Mother Damian Duncombe Brisbane (Federation)
1963-1981	Yangoru	Leo Arkfeld Wewak	Felix (Mary) Wildie	Mother Fabian Connell Rockhampton (Federation)
1965-1991	Pumakos	George Bernarding Mt Hagen	Francis Harcombe	Mother Philomena Ryman North Sydney (Federation)
1970-1980	Negrie	Leo Arkfeld Wewak	Marie (Leonie) Williams	Mother Pius Carroll Townsville (Federation)
1977-1992	Aitape	William Rowell Aitape	Terry Quinlivan (1978)	Sister Valda Ward (Conference of Sisters of Mercy of Australia)

MERCY FOUNDATIONS/ COMMUNITIES WITHIN PNG

Dates	Place of Mission	Leader	Bishop/ Diocese	Authorising Leader
1963-1974	Ulupu	Francis Regis Everingham	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Damian Ducombe Brisbane
1963-1973	Kup	Elizabeth Miller	Bernard Schilling (Goroka)	Patrick Mahoney Goroka
1965-1975	Koge	Julian (Algra) Clarke	John Cohill (Goroka)	Patrick Mahoney Goroka
1966	Yarapos	Christine Watt	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Damian Ducombe Brisbane
1967-1973	Goglme	Valda Finlay	John Cohill (Goroka)	Elizabeth Miller Goroka
1968	Holy Trinity Teachers Col- lege Mt Hagen	Francis Harcombe	George Bernarding (Mt Hagen)	Philomena Ryman North Sydney
1969	Kaindi	Francis Regis Everingham	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Damian Ducombe

1970-1993	Kairiru	Misericordia Carter	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Damian Duncombe
1971-1973	Neragaima	Margaret Bubb	John Cohill (Goroka)	Elizabeth Miller
1974-1990	Kondiu	Valda Finlay	John Cohill (Goroka)	Elizabeth Miller
1974-1976	Lait Blong Moning (Morning Light)	Denise Coghlan	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Catherine Courtney Brisbane
1978-1984	Melanesian Institute	Wendy Flannery	John Cohill (Goroka)	Catherine Courtney Brisbane
1978-1989	Liturgical Catechetical Institute	Judith Hourigan	John Cohill (Goroka)	Catherine Courtney Brisbane
1979-1992	Drekikir	Ann O'Regan	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Catherine Courtney Brisbane
1984-1987	Bishop Leo High School	Maureen Grant	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Helen O'Brien Sisters of Mercy PNG
1982-1998	Xavier Institute	Cheryl Camp	Virgil Copas (Pt Moresby)	Helen O'Brien Sisters of Mercy PNG
1980-1985	Neragaima	Joan Adams	Raymond Caesar (Goroka)	Dorothy Champion Union Leader Canberra
1982-2001	Catherine's House Novitiate	Ursula Gilbert	Leo Arkfeld (Wewak)	Helen O'Brien Sisters of Mercy PNG
1989	McAuley House	Joan McGinley	George Bernarding (Mt Hagen)	Joan McGinley Sisters of Mercy PNG
1990-1994	Wanepap	Clare Gilchrist	Hermann Raich (Wabag)	Joan McGinley PNG Sisters of Mercy PNG
1999-2002	Neragaima	Sophie Samiak	Henk te Maarssen (Kundiawa)	Helen O'Brien Sisters of Mercy PNG
2003	West Papua Refugees	Maureen Sexton	Gilles Côté (Kiunga)	Mercy Works Inc. Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia
2003	Coolock	Carmel Martin	Francesco Sarego (Goroka)	Mariska Kua Sisters of Mercy PNG



- Joan Adams 1980-84, 85-87
 Beryl Amedee 72
 Winifred Anderton 65-73
 Betty Angalapai 94-99
 Claudia Apalenda 92
 Emmerentiana Awehi 2001
 Jennifer Bailey 71-2001
 RoseMary Baker 71-78, 84-2001
 Nina (Josephine) Barra 66-74
 M Justina Bedford 81-82
 Valerie Birchley 63-70, 72-75
 Christine Bisley 78-80
 Kaye Bolwell 2003
 Theresa Boyek 92
 M Loyola Boyle 63-74
 Margaret Boyle 89-91
 Margaret Bray 73-74, 90-91
 M Sarto Breen 63-69
 M Eamon Brennan 75-93 †
 Marie Britza 85-88
 Eileen Brosnan 72-73
 Margaret Bubb 60-73, 78-84
 Betty Busuttin 78-79
 M Alberta Busuttin 76-77
 Joseph Xavier Byrne 58-65 †
 Josephine Byrnes 72-74
 Nell Callaghan 73-77, 79-86, 88-91, 96-98
 Irene Callanan 68-75, 77-84, 89-9, 96-2004
 Cheryl Camp 74-84
 Carmel Carroll 86-88, 91-94
 Anne Frances Carroll 71-74, 77-80, 82-87, 89-97
 Irene Carroll (Irenaeus) 56-62, 67-70 †
 Patricia Carroll 72-73
 Misericordia Carter 67-92 †
 Angela Casey 70-71 †
 Stancia (Philomene) Cawte 63-74
 Valda (Philip) Cervetto 57-90
 Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood 63-70
 Veronica Clarke 87, 90-92
 Desma Clarke 70-72, 74-80
 M Julian Clarke 56-67 †
 Margaret (Patrice) Clarke 61-71
 Moira Cleary 85-90 †
 Margaret Clinch 67-72
 Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan 66-74
 Noreen Collins 72-75
 Isobel Condon 57-77, 83-87 †
 Janet Connellan 77
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 Patricia Crowe 67-70, 72
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 M Brendan Daly 65-76
 Vicki Dean 77-79
 Elizabeth Devine 73-74
 Miriam Devine 79-89
 Romley (Vianney) Dirrmann 78-83
 Margaret Dixon 68-71, 73
 Jacinta Dolan 71
 M Josefena Dooley 69-71
 Ellen Dunn 85-90
 Bernadette Eckersley 70-71
 Robina Eide 2003
 Francis Regis Everingham 57-77 †
 Schola Fakiwi 95
 Kay Farrell 66-71
 Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy 57-67, 72-75
 Valda (Padua) Finlay 65-78, 80-93
 Marlene (Marie Bernard) Fitzgibbons 68-77
 Teresa (Matthew) Flaherty 64-2003
 Wendy (Gonzaga) Flannery 69-74, 78-83
 Clare (Kieran) Flinn 75-76, 79-88
 Maureen Flynn 68-71
 Gabrielle Flood 72-73, 88
 Petronia Maree Gawi 64
 Cecily (Finton) Geary 67-72 †
 Mary Geason 80-81
 Marie Geddes 2003-5
 Ursula (Marie Loreto) Gilbert 62-64, 81-87

Clare (de Paul) Gilchrist 65-97
 Mary (Antonita) Gleeson 58-59
 Theresia Tau Gongi 85-
 Margaret Graham 74-78
 Maureen (Augustine) Grant 63-70, 73-82, 84-94
 Nola Gray 68-74, 76
 Cynthia Griffin 83-85, 87-92
 Anne Hannigan 77-78
 Frances Hanrahan 77-80
 Frances Harcombe 65-78 †
 Dorothy Anne (Emily) Harrick 60-62
 Catherine Harris 85-91
 Rita (Charles) Hassett 64-69, 73-82, 86-90
 Coral (Felicita) Hedley 66-73
 Catherine Hefferan 81-85
 Cecilia Hollis 71-72, 74-75
 Ann Hook 86-93
 Joan Hooper 59-75
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 Margaret Houlihan 74-78
 Judith Hourigan 75-79
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 Therese (Vincent) Kelly 58-59 †
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 Mariska Kua 86-
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 Joan MacGinley 78-80, 82-92, 95-
 M Patrick Mahoney 57-71 †
 Bernadette Marks 78-81
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 Josephine Martyn 79-80
 Pauline Masters 85-89, 2001
 Irene Masterson 82-2002
 Mavis McBride 80-84 †
 Carmel McCormick 71-80, 82-84, 86-90
 Maria Goretti McCosker 66-67
 Helen (Augustine) McDonnell 65-89
 Josette McDonnell 78-89
 Anne McDonnell 82-88
 Ann McGill 68-72
 Christin McIntosh 74-75
 Winifred McManus 78-82
 Mae (Bernard) McMurrough 65 †
 Annunziata McNamara 58-59 †
 Elizabeth Miller 56-84 †
 Mary St Roch Moore 60-65 †
 Nance Munro 85-89 †
 Agnes Murphy 82-87, 90-
 Deirdre Murphy 81
 Marie Murphy 83-89
 Jean Murray 70-74
 Shirley Myers 59-63
 Theresia Nakankwien 86-
 Mary Nambakwen 94-2000
 Athalie Neary 70-75
 Thanh ThuyThi Nguyen
 Helen O'Brien 78-87, 90-2003
 Mary O'Connor 83
 Madeline O'Dea 75-80
 Maureen O'Donnell 84-88
 Bernadette O'Dwyer 70-72, 76-84, 87-90, 91-97 †
 Mary O'Keeffe 64-68
 Ann O'Regan 74-88, 90-97, 98-2003
 Maura O'Shaughnessy 71-86, 87-
 Patricia O'Shea 86-93
 Joan O'Toole 80-96
 Rose Pelleri 70-73
 Elizabeth Pepom 95-98
 Cephas Philben 57-66, 69-71, 81-88 †
 Helen Pili 91-93
 Margaret Powell 79-80
 Therese Quinlivan 77-82
 Monica Raper 77, 88
 Frances Readman 91-2001
 Julie Rees 81-83
 Ellen Reid 71
 Colleen Rhodes 79-81
 Maria Jean Rhule 78-84, 87-90
 M Marietta Riedy 57-68

Christina Riordan 68-77
 Marea Roberts 74
 Kathleen Robertson 70-76
 Bernadette Rodgers 86-87
 Margaret Roni 98-
 Anna Roughan 88-89
 Margaret (Matthew) Rush 63-67
 Elva (Gertrude) Russell 58-62 †
 Julie Anne Ryan 80-88, 90-
 Margaret Ryan 77-80
 Sophie Samiak 89-
 M Victorina Sant 95-98
 Mary (de Padua) Scanlan 63-70, 72-77 †
 Margaret Schrumé 69-72
 Helena Scoins 74-76
 Margaret Scroope 75-76, 86
 Maureen Sexton 2002-
 Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft 65-99
 Margarita Shannon 57-75, 77-85, 87-90
 Angeline Singiat 87-
 Susan Smith 85-91
 Mary Stallard 81-90, 2000
 Jill (Raymond) Stringer 66-72, 74-75
 Theodora Talili 2001-05
 Theresia Tina 99-
 Judith Treacy 81-84
 Philomena Waira 99-
 Christine Watt 66-70, 71-74, 94-95
 Maryanne Webb 72
 Kathleen Whelan 76
 Helen White 78-84, 88-90, 97-99, 2004-
 Valerie (Valentine) White 63-66
 Beverley Whitton 82-85, 87-93
 Jacinta Wiedman 63-74, 76-91
 M Joseph Wightley 73
 Mary (Felix) Wildie 58-67
 Marie (Leonie) Williams 70-78
 Margaret (Rose) Wilson 69-78, 91
 Patricia (Genevieve) Wood 63-67, 73
 Sebastina Yangin 94-2004
 Lilian Yopichi 2001-03
 Marylyne Yull 2001-03

APPENDIX 4. FROM A LAY MISSIONARY'S DIARY – ANNE FLAHERTY

On a year's leave from my regular employment as a qualified teacher in South Australia, I found myself living and teaching on a mission station in the Highlands at Koge, where each person had their special role to support the local community. Koge personnel were involved in the church, the school, the farm, the bakery, the small hospital (one bush room) and assisting local coffee growers. Sister Clement Mary was our special nurse, who helped me in my early months when flea bites became infected and I wore the bandages around my ankles to give me the knick-name 'Trotter'. This name came from the other lay missionaries – Paul McNamara, Dave Hamilton and Dave Bateman from Australia and Pat Lalolie and Adrian Stanaway from New Zealand. These were builders, financial advisers, farm managers, bakery managers and general helpers. This help included organising and giving advice to "all hands on deck" on how to cut up a cow and package the meat for the freezer, and our future meals!

While I was on a working holiday, I admired the work done by these dedicated people. Firstly, it was a wonderful experience to work with my elder sister, Tess, and to be part of the environment I had read about in her home letters for many years. Secondly, it was an 'eye-opener' seeing the different roles and commitment of the religious and lay missionaries. I experienced seeing a birth for the first time, with Sister Clement Mary guiding me to help with the after birth. Another time, one of my students, Joseph Emau, came to ask for my help with a badly damaged knee wrapped in banana leaves. Fortunately, Sister Clement Mary took over her nursing duties as my face paled at the sight, as Joseph undid the 'bandage' and the full knee damage was revealed.

Travelling on the roads taught me to be prepared for anything. We had many adventures where the four wheel drive detoured into the roadside *barats*, got stuck in the mud, parts underneath fell off, we got caught in a landslide, or bridges needed some repair before we could cross. We relied on local help and sometimes needed the use of highway roadside machinery to get us back on track. I was amazed at, and trusted the skill of the mission drivers, especially Tess's skill. One such drive was over the Daulo Pass to Goroka where we had to measure the outside part of the road past a broken down vehicle with Tess's apron, while I stood stoically near the edge, guiding the driver and refusing to look behind at the 1,000 foot drop below. That was the only time we got away by ourselves to enjoy a break in Goroka!

My time in PNG gave me many amazing memories and friendships. One friendship was with Angela Nilkare, our 'kuk meri', who when I left showed the emotion typical of Papua New Guineans. It hurt me to see her so distressed. She had vowed to see me again and, after regular correspondence which kept my Pidgin language skills challenged, she arrived in Adelaide several years later. It was my joy to meet Angela again, to have her stay with me, see my environment and meet my large family.

My one year in PNG was a remarkable year. However, helping Tess with the layout and sorting of photos and maps for the Mercy Book has really enlightened me. What truly amazing and inspiring stories of commitment of Mercy sisters from Australia and Papua New Guinea!

APPENDIX 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge a former Leader of the Sisters of Mercy PNG, Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy, who entrusted me with writing our Mercy story, and the succeeding Leaders, Helen O'Brien and Mariska Kua and their leadership teams that have supported me in this work.

I acknowledge the Sisters of Mercy who answered the call to Mercy in PNG for a long or a short time. It is because of their courage that the Mercy story in PNG has come into being. In listening to so many individual sisters who responded to their call, the personal costs involved, the joys and sorrows, the giving and receiving, I have been privileged and profoundly humbled.

The contributions of many Sisters of Mercy through their written correspondence, original historical analysis, reports, academic works, reflections and photographic collections helped form the structure of this commemorative book. The text is enriched through resources gathered from interviews, consultations, the patient checking and correction of written materials and sharing of valuable personal insights. I would like to mention the priceless written references of Mother Francis Regis Everingham, Sisters Deirdre O'Connor, Pauline Smith and RoseMary Baker, and the faithful scribes of the Sisters' Chronicles - particularly those whose writings are more prominent, such as Ann O'Regan and Marie Williams. Unfortunately, the names of many chroniclers, being anonymous, go unrecorded, but their work lives on in the form of numerous creative impressions in the Archives.

Sisters who helped considerably with their local knowledge and wider perspectives are Jenny Bailey, RoseMary Baker, M.Loyola Boyle, Margaret Bubb, Cheryl Camp, Stancia Cawte, Val Cervetto, Valda Finlay, Wendy Flannery, Ursula Gilbert, Clare Gilchrist, Cynthia Griffin, Rita Hassett, Mariska Kua, Carmel McCormick, Helen McDonell, Josette McDonell, Joan MacGinley, Josephine Martyn, Irene Masterson, Agnes Murphy, Helen O'Brien, Ann O'Regan, Maria Jean Rhule, Maura O'Shaughnessy, Julie Anne Ryan, Margaret Ryan, Margaret Shakeshaft, Margarita Shannon, Angeline Singiat, Sue Smith, Christine Watt, Helen White, Jacinta Wiedman, Mary Wildie and Marie Williams. The Mercy archivists generously accommodated me on my travels and graciously provided me with their resources in the Congregation Archives. Sisters Deirdre O'Connor and Denise Coen of the Adelaide Congregation Archives offered reliable assistance and encouragement.

Many former Australian Leaders of the Institute who played significant roles in the birth and development of the Sisters of Mercy PNG and whose names are acknowledged in the text, have generously offered their perspectives. A number of bishops, priests, sisters and lay people in PNG whose names are also referred to in the publication, provided valuable observations and reflections. However, I take responsibility, and apologise in advance, for any mistakes, oversight of significant information or lack of cultural perspectives. It is my hope that some omissions and inadequacies may be addressed in a more concise historical account as yet in the making.

Regarding the discipline of historical research I am indebted to Sister Rosa MacGinley PBVM and Sister Sophie McGrath RSM. In the initial stages the Columban mission scholar, Father Cyril Halley, offered encouragement, quietly insisting on the significance of the Mercy

story in the mission history of the Australian Church. I express gratitude to the Adelaide Congregation for providing a work place conducive to research; to the Sisters of Mercy PNG for their patience and encouragement and for meeting the financial requirements of publication; and to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, Papua New Guinea and Pakistan for financial support for professional consultation.

Many have provided support in the preparation for publishing - Hilary Regan, Director of the Australasian Theological Forum, Astrid Senkey, Caroline Ryan, Stephanie Thomas, Helen O'Brien, Carina Flaherty, Bob Bennett, Rita Hassett, Denise Coen, my sister, Anne, and brother, Ted, Flaherty and members of my family and Mercy community who were there on call. To them I express my particular esteem and gratitude for their resilience and expertise. Countless others have contributed to the PNG Mercy story with their prayers and moral support, particularly my mother, family, sisters and friends from Australia and Papua New Guinea.

I acknowledge the generosity of the many sisters who sent photos for the publication. Their contribution provided a rich source for illustrating general themes of the written text. In this matter I am also indebted to Sister Kay Lane (Brisbane Congregation Archives) and Peter Connell (Mercy Heritage Centre, Brisbane).

My expression of appreciation would be incomplete without recognition of the Mercy sisters who have gone ahead to eternal life. It is with the help of unexplained timely interventions that the complex steps forwards and backwards, the unexpected twists and turns, and the anxious waiting or timeless dreaming spaces in between came together eventually, culminating in the pattern of the present publication.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Teresa Flaherty, a Sister of Mercy from Adelaide, South Australia, went to Goroka in 1964 - the first overseas mission set up by the Australian Sisters of Mercy in 1956. She was then appointed as Head Teacher to Koge mission school, and became supervisory teacher of the four primary schools which the mission established in the remote areas of the parish and which were run by indigenous staff. When the National Teaching Service was introduced in 1971 she became an Inspector, promoting the localisation policy for teachers of the Administration and Church schools. Travelling throughout the Simbu province enabled her to stay in touch with the teaching and nursing sisters on the rural mission stations.

The movement towards Independence and the spread of the teachings of Vatican II inspired many missionaries to 'read the signs of the times'. Within the structure of religious and church authority Teresa joined the Goroka Teachers College (later the University of Goroka) in 1974, and responded to the constant challenges of growing localisation goals in a democratic and Christian nation and the rights of women students and teachers. Teacher education visits throughout the country were opportunities to see the situation at the grassroots level within a national focus.

Education consultancy was a means of keeping in touch with the Mercy sisters. During the 1980s the sisters were mostly Australians in at least 25 different places criss-crossing the country from Aitape to Port Moresby, from Enga to Rabaul, whereas by the turn of the century they comprised a small, but steady contingent of indigenous sisters outnumbering the expatriates. Teresa served as Leader of the Union Sisters of Mercy (1974-76) and on the PNG Leadership Team (1996-2002).

Teresa's knowledge and experience was informed by overseas study - official educational visits to South East Asia (1972, 1973), M. A. at Michigan State University (1979), spiritual renewal in Melbourne (1985), a sabbatical in cross-cultural studies at the University of Surrey, U.K. (1989) and PhD - the Women's Voice in Education in PNG - at Macquarie University, NSW (1996). In her last ten years at the University of Goroka (1992-2002) Teresa became more directly involved in administration, research and consultancy. Working under, and alongside, some of her former teacher education students gave her a great sense of privilege. Six short-term United Nations consultancy visits to Bougainville (1995-2001) were precious ones as the people, and the women in particular, worked courageously to reconcile and create a future of peace. Changing social conditions, as well as the church's expanded vision of mission and religious life, were part of Teresa's consciousness in her 39 years in PNG.

To gain a more global and spiritual perspective in preparation for writing the Mercy PNG history, Teresa visited the Sisters of Mercy in South Africa, Kenya and the Mercy International Centre in Ireland, and attended an international peace conference at the United Nations in 2002. To acquire the skills to portray the lived experiences of the Mercy religious women - nearly 180 Australian and 20 PNG sisters - in a historical way, she enrolled in doctoral studies with the Australian Catholic University (2005-). Since returning to Australia in 2003 Teresa has been back to PNG three times as a guest of the Sisters of Mercy in order to keep abreast of contemporary developments there.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book commemorates fifty years of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea. Shortly after World War II the Australian Church was encouraged to support overseas missions in the Pacific. At the invitation of Bishops in New Guinea a community of four Sisters of Mercy left for Goroka in 1956 while a band of seven headed for Wewak in 1957.

The number of sisters grew as more foundations were made in the dioceses of Goroka, Wewak, Mount Hagen and Aitape to meet the needs of changing times in education, health, and pastoral and social concerns. Emboldened by the spiritual and cultural ideals of Vatican II, the sisters played a part in building up an emerging local Church and contributing to a country rapidly moving towards, and consolidating, Independence (1975).

Within twenty-five years the sisters responded to the call of young indigenous women to join them. This move highlighted a growing need for the different foundations of sisters to unite. Gradually, the number of Papua New Guinean sisters grew while that of the Australian sisters decreased. As the new contingent assumed more and more responsibility and Melanesian cultural values were incorporated, the united group of the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea exhibited a multi-cultural face. This was shaped as the sisters stood with and by the people in their times of struggle and joy.

At the end of the fifty-year period, the status of autonomous region, as an integral part of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, was granted by Rome. At the Jubilee celebrations in the Highlands and Coast pioneer and former missionary sisters from Australia were welcomed by the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea Region, under their first national Leader, Sister Mariska Kua. In all, hundreds of women, men and children from the sisters' former and current places of ministry helped in organising the gatherings, and thousands joined in the Eucharistic celebrations and singsings. For the sisters these occasions were unique and memorable times of reunion and thanksgiving.