

Holy Spirit College
P.O. Box 1717
Boroko, Papua New Guinea



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To Mr. & Mrs. Rice & Family -

Christmas Greetings to you and yours from Papua New Guinea !

Today the last of the students leave for their homes in various parts of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to enjoy a well-earned holiday after their year of studies. (Christmas is the time for the long "summer" holidays in this part of the world.) Last Sunday the year's activities here came to a fitting climax with the Ordination to the Diaconate of 12 seminarians - the biggest number in the short history of the Seminary. The Ordination ceremony, which was conducted by the Archbishop of Port Moresby assisted by two other local Bishops, was very impressive. Now the campus is unusually quiet as the remaining staff members tie up various loose strings left over from the past academic year and make tentative plans for the new year, before we too leave for retreats, holidays and supply work on various mission stations.

It is hard to realize that my first year in the Missions is over. From the moment I stepped off the 'plane on the evening of Ash Wednesday last and got my first taste of the humid heat of the tropics, I have been kept so busy that I hardly had time to reflect on the radically new type of life which I had begun. Even now it is difficult to put a few general reflections down on paper.

This is a country full of contrasts. The mainland (which is about ten times the size of Ireland) is dominated by the huge mountain range which runs east to west and divides the country in two. The highest mountain is 14,793 feet above sea level and is occasionally covered with snow, although it is not far from the Equator. (I hope to spend December -and Christmas- on a mission-station not far from that mountain and intent to climb it, if I get a chance.) On both sides of the mountain range, huge rivers rush down to the Pacific Ocean through rich valleys and vast mosquito-infested swamps. To the north of the mainland lies the Bismark Archipelago, including three huge islands (Bougainville, New Ireland and New Britain) which are all over 300 miles long, one of which (Bougainville) boasts the second biggest copper mine in the world. Hundreds of smaller tropical islands are scattered around the coasts. In January, I will visit the group of Islands known as Manus, where I will represent the Seminary at the ordination and first Mass of the only diocesan candidate this year. This will be an opportunity for me to visit the mission stations there and to experience first-hand what the pastoral problems are on a tropical island. Manus is the most northerly part of PNG and the part which is thus closest to the Equator.

The people are as diverse as the land - if not more so. There are an estimated 700 different languages and cultures, even though the population is not quite as much as that of Ireland. English is the official language but the majority speak Pidgin which is a rather simple language based on the structure of the local Melanesian languages and composed of words derived mostly from English and German. Because of the diversity of cultures, PNG is an anthropologist's paradise. For those of us involved in the training of future priests, as well as for the missionaries in the field, this means that we have a considerable amount of work to do in order to understand these various cultures and their religious basis. This is necessary if the Faith is to become firmly rooted in the local (cultural) soil. It is also important in order to understand the mentality of the seminarians, their problems, etc.

The Church, too, is many-sided. In some places, such as the Islands and the coastal areas, Christianity has been at work for almost a century and a strong tradition has grown up. In other places (especially the Highlands), the first missionaries only went in after the second World War. Some Mission stations are but 20 years old - and already boast of candidates for the priesthood. The Catholic Church makes up

about a third of the population and is divided into 16 dioceses (plus 2 in the politically independent Solomon Islands). Lutheran, Congregationalists and Anglicans (mostly High Church) come next, while over a 100 smaller Protestant denominations and sects are active all over the country, some of them causing great confusion and trouble. Among the bigger and long established denominations, however, the ecumenical spirit is exceptionally good and there is considerable co-operation. For example, the various seminaries (including Holy Spirit) form one board to oversee the standard of theological formation and organize joint seminars, etc. (Unfortunately, due to physical location more direct co-operation is not possible.)

During the short breaks between terms I had the opportunity to visit some of the Mission stations on the south coast and in the Highlands. The work being done by the priests, sisters, brothers and lay missionaries "in the bush" is truly impressive. And of course you hear stories of the early missionaries - the pioneers - everywhere. What they suffered and achieved is truly remarkable. But now a great change of emphasis can be observed: this is the change from being a missionary area into a local Church, self-reliant and come of age. It is time for the missionaries to withdraw gradually and allow the local Church to develop its own identity as directed by the Holy Spirit.

Central to the localization of the Church is the training of local priests. Up to now, the Church has not been too successful in this regard. There are less than 50 local priests and bishops scattered among over 500 missionary clergy. But at the moment there are over 100 major seminarians studying here at the Holy Spirit Seminary, around half of whom are diocesan and the rest members of various Orders (Sacred Heart, Marists, Franciscans, Capuchins and Dominicans). Although the SVDs have been working here over 80 years and number some 250 priests and brothers, we have not taken vocations, that is up to three years ago, since it was our policy to build up the diocesan clergy. This year the first three SVDs started their theological studies here and two more are expected next year after they finish their Noviciate. To cope with this new development, we are building a new SVD College within the campus here. Next year D.V. I will move into the new college with the Rector and the seminarians. (But at the moment we are getting a little worried that the building may not be ready on time and ~~we~~ are kept busy with the usual tug-o'-war with builder and architect.)

The Seminary is situated about 12 miles from the national capital (Port Moresby) and consists of a large complex of colleges, lecture halls, library and Church, not to mention playing fields and other sporting facilities. It is surrounded by several noviciates, a House of Formation for (local) Sisters, a contemplative convent of Carmelite nuns, two secondary schools for boys and girls run by Sisters and de la Salle Brothers, a Catechetical Centre, as well as the Police Collge and what must be the largest jail in the country !! (According to reports in the papers, the Seventh Day Adventists plan to found a University nearby....) Apart from our lecturing and the usual academic activities, we also help out pastorally in the various institution 'round about, and so exercise our priestly ministry at least on a small scale.

The change between my former life as a "student" in Germany and my present occupation here in the tropics could hardly have been more radical. At times the going was rough enough - especially since I had such little time to prepare my lectures or get to know the country, its people and problems. But I was greatly helped by my fellow-staff members, in particular my SVD confreres here in the Seminary. The co-operation of the students and their eagerness to learn also made things easier. Since I was so busy, I soon became almost oblivious to the tropical heat, the mosquitoes and the thousand other insects who seem to enjoy Irish flesh - not to mention the occasional snake (some of which are deadly poisonous) and tremor of the odd earthquake. I look forward to seeing a little more of life "in the bush" and spending my first Christmas under the Southern Cross. And then begins a new year (lectures begin on Feb. 11th), God willing. Please remember me in your prayers as I remember you and yours.

Wishing you every Peace and Blessing at Christmas and in the New Year 1980 !

Hoping you are all keeping well -

Sincerely Dr. Vincent Tunnay.