



# The Catholic Reporter

Catholic Bishops' Conference of PNG & SI - Commission on Social Communications, P.O. Box 398, Waigani, NCD Tel.: 325 9577 - Fax: 323 2551

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## Pope Francis writes Apostolic Letter on the Nativity Scene

- Zenit



**Pope Francis has written an Apostolic Letter entitled 'Admirabile Signum,' on the meaning and importance of the Nativity Scene. He signed it on the afternoon of Dec. 1, 2019, the first Sunday of Advent, in the Franciscan Shrine in Greccio, where St. Francis of Assisi made the first ever Nativity Scene. Below are extracts from the letter.**

The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman.

The origin of the Christmas crèche is found above all in certain details of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as related in the Gospels. The evangelist Luke says simply that Mary "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7). Jesus was laid in a manger. The nativity scene evokes a number of the mysteries of Jesus' life and brings them close to our own daily lives. With the simplicity of that sign, Saint Francis carried out a great work of evangelization. His teaching touched the hearts of Christians and continues today to offer a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith.

First, there is the background of a starry sky wrapped in the darkness and silence of night. We represent this not only out of fidelity to the Gospel accounts, but also for its symbolic value. We can think of all those times in our lives when we have experienced the darkness of night. Yet even then, God does not

abandon us, but is there to answer our crucial questions about the meaning of life. We arrange the mountains, streams, sheep and shepherds in the nativity scene! As we do so, we are reminded that, as the prophets had foretold, all creation rejoices in the coming of the Messiah. The angels and the guiding star are a sign that we too are called to set out for the cave and to worship the Lord. It is customary to add many symbolic figures to our nativity scenes.

There are the beggars and the others who know only the wealth of the heart. They too have every right to draw near to the Infant Jesus; no one can evict them or send them away from a crib so makeshift that the poor seem entirely at home. We come to the cave, where we find the figures of Mary and Joseph. Mary is a mother who contemplates her child and shows him to every visitor. The figure of Mary makes us reflect on the great mystery that surrounded this young woman when God knocked on the door of her immaculate heart. At Mary's side, shown protecting the Child and his Mother, stands Saint Joseph. He is usually depicted with staff in hand or holding up a lamp. Saint Joseph plays an important role in the life of Jesus and Mary. He is the guardian who tirelessly protects his family. When, at Christmas, we place the statue of the Infant Jesus in the manger, the nativity scene suddenly comes alive. The nativity scene shows us

God that came into our world, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God's own life. It invites us to become his disciples if we want to attain ultimate meaning in life. As the feast of Epiphany approaches, we place the statues of the Three Kings in the Christmas crèche. Observing the star, those wise men from the East set out for Bethlehem, in order to find Jesus and to offer him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These costly gifts have an allegorical meaning: gold honours Jesus' kingship, incense his divinity, myrrh his sacred humanity that was to experience death and burial. As we contemplate this aspect of the nativity scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of every Christian to spread the Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Like Saint Francis, may we open our hearts to this simple grace, so that from our wonderment a humble prayer may arise: a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who wished to share with us his all, and thus never to leave us alone.



## CPS concerned with slurry spillage approach

The Catholic Professionals Society of PNG (CPS) is calling on the National Government through its responsible Minister and State agencies, especially Mineral

seas. There has been confirmation by the operating company of the slurry spillage. Whether the deaths are from the impact of slurry is the main issue to be scientifically and conclusively determined.

The Catholic Professionals Society PNG is very concerned at the level of politics being generated on the slurry spillage at Basamuk bay and its alleged aftermath on environment, marine biology, and people within the vicinity and potential impact footprints in greater Madang islands and the coastlines. The slurry spillage happened about late August 2019, and even up to now, our leaders are not finding time to sit together and approach the issue with a united stance.

We are also concerned that the MRA and CEPA are not actively engaged to assist leaders find workable way forward. We call on all leaders and bureaucrats involved to work together to ensure that PNG has a

national position on the issue of slurry spillage and its aftermath.

We are aware that litigation is mooted. It is a matter right under our law. We only caution that our people be assisted with options such as a negotiated settlement as was done for the environmental issue at Ok Tedi mine along the Lower Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers systems.

There is also the precautionary option for the Government to either close the operations or restrict the extent of operations of the project pending scientific and conclusive determination and clearance of the effects and impacts of the slurry spillage.

Catholic Professionals Society PNG will support actions intended to protect the people and environment of Basamuk and Madang.

Resources Authority (MRA) and Conservation Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) to act responsibly on the slurry spillage, which has spilled into the Basamuk Bay area of Madang.

There have been reports of at least 1 person, several turtles, dolphins and fish dead and claimed to be attributed to poisoning from the spillage. These are serious allegations. There are fears among people using the seas and eating marine products from the

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# Growth is the only sign of life

- Sr Mary McCarthy pbvm

Saint John Henry Newman was canonized by Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica, Rome on 13 October. Bp Bill Fey OFM Cap was present and concelebrated the joyful outdoor Mass in the midst of a huge crowd.

Growth is the only sign of life. To grow is to change. To be perfect is to change often. Such thought-provoking statements offer much food for our reflection, discussion and prayer.

Bp Bill Fey OFM Cap had so much to say in his talk on the newly canonized Saint John Henry Newman. Hence, on the afternoon of Sunday, 27th October, Bp Bill gave a talk at the Catholic Bishops' Conference PNGSI. What made this such an engaging talk was that Bp Bill spent time where Newman lived and taught; he celebrated Mass at Newman's own altar in his study and he studied Newman's own books in which he saw the text that Newman underlined and read the notes written in the margins!

Our talk began with the prayer 'Lead Kindly Light' - a well-known prayer of John Henry Newman, in which he expresses his feelings about facing darkness and uncertainty and, in face of that, his complete trust that God will lead him safely home. Newman could be critical of too much talk about virtues. He preferred living saints. He had a deep, humble, obedient sense of personal

mission. He expressed it in these words well-known to many who have struggled to respond to God's call to a challenging mission: God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another... Somehow I am necessary for His purposes... if indeed I fail He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet, I have a part in this great work. Therefore, I will trust Him (1848). How can we be convinced of what is right and true? Gazing on the face of Christ. Conscience is the voice of the unseen God. We know God when we hear God's voice in our conscience. Faith is not like our knowledge of the things around us. Faith is because God has said it. Faith is a gift of grace. Faith is believing the words of a witness. It is always interpersonal - a personal relationship with God and the world of people and the whole of creation.

Newman is a source of inspiration and in his many writings he challenges us to grow, to not

be afraid. For example, in 1859 he published 'On Consulting the Faithful...' This is important because only in this way can we know what God has revealed to his people. In his work on the Development of the Doctrine which he wrote in 4 months, we find the idea that it is necessary to change often if we are to truly grow. Falling into error is not to be feared because error will crack under pressure. What is wrong will disintegrate.

Truth will prevail. Another book, The Idea of a University, is still consulted today to provide a vision of what a university should be. It is an institution for those who seek enlargement of the mind. It should truly address what is universal. Don't be afraid of the truth; don't be afraid to listen to conflicting ideas. The truth will come out.



## The Gift of Christmas

Fr Ambrose Pereira sdb  
CBC SOCOM and Youth Secretary

*'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' - Lk 2:11.'*



The little baby Jesus was born on that Holy Night in Bethlehem. His mother and father kept watch over him. They struggled to find a place for him, knocking at every door. Yet they were greeted with the common refrain, 'No Room in the Inn'. The only place was the animal shed with no comforts of a cosy home. The newborn king, God's gift to the world lay in a simple manger, watched over lovingly by Mary his mother and Joseph his father. Honouring him was the host of heavenly angels, the simple and humble shepherds, the wise kings with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh together with the sheep, goats, cows and many of creation that came to pay him homage.

This Christmas scene depicts so beautifully the gift of parents to children. The gift of loving parents and the acceptance of God's will in the face of struggle and hardship. Above all the most precious gift of Christ as Saviour to the World. Christmas is the feast of gift-giving. The commercial world encourages us to spend lavishly on toys, sweets, decorations and parties. The humble birth of the Christ Child invites us to gaze at the crib and reflect on our gift-giving.

As parents and children, we are invited to be the gift to each member of our family. May our gift be of love and understanding, acceptance and forgiveness, joy and happiness in each of our homes and families. Rather than a new iPad, the latest iPhone or the most expensive digital device, let us spend more quality time with each other listening to the moments of joy and happiness, struggle and pain in the lives of our children. Let us remember that these gifts cannot be replaced as each one is unique and as they grow, they become more exquisite and valuable and they will stay in our hearts for a long, long time.

As we treasure each other let us also treasure the gift of our planet Earth. The recent Amazonian Synod calls us to a pastoral, cultural, environmental and synodal conversion. Each one is invited to join forces and network with church and secular groups to preserve our environment in creative and intelligent ways. May we choose ways to reduce, reuse and recycle our waste. May we search for ways to ensure that the planet is preserved for generations to come.



Finally, as we conclude our first Year of the Laity, we are called to ensure that our lives radiate the light of Christ in our lives.

May Christmas be a joyous one for us and the members of our family! May 2020 be filled with the blessings of Our Lord, His Mother and BI Peter ToRot.

## DMI Sisters empowering women

With the objective to empower women, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate or DMI Sisters have been conducting various forms of training for women in the settlements of Port Moresby.



- Abigail Seta

During the month of October, the DMI Sisters visited Korobosea, Kaugere, Kogeva, Sabama and Joyce Bay areas where they have involved over hundreds of women and have formed fifty-eight Self-Help Groups. According to the program coordinator, Sr. Lilly Pushpam, the sisters have been conducting trainings such as awareness on health and hygiene, leadership training, community awareness program, cooking training and visitations to the sick in the hospital. The Sisters also conducted Child Development programs for the children in those communities.

"The women were very happy about the leadership training which they have received. They could identify themselves and their responsibilities in the family and the group. This training made the women to take up leadership roles," said Sr Lilly.

Sr Lilly said that SHG members have always been involved in the community development activities like helping children, women in distress, taking up social issues, and creating awareness in the community. She added that DMI works to love and serve



unconditionally the poor and the marginalised and helps them to organise themselves by realising their dreams, potentials and needs.

Currently, there are four DMI sisters in the country who have been working with the people living in the settlements since December 2018.

### CHRISTMAS GREETINGS!

*"Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us" (Lk 2:15).*



**May the New Born Child radiate His Peace and shower Love on you and your family!**

- Catholic Bishops Conference



## Christmas of unity and courage

Fr. Giorgio Licini, PIME  
CBC General Secretary

The people of Bougainville went to the polls over the past few weeks to choose between independence and a greater autonomy. It is a new chapter in a long

lasting search for identity and their own journey as a community, possibly as a nation. It is the duty of every individual and every group to define a purpose and a path, to offer a positive contribution, to live, grow and die living behind things a bit better than the way they were found.

More generally, it may help looking back at the end of the year at our weaknesses and our strengths, the successful stories and the failures, the achievements and the broken promises. December is a month full of inspiration and hope. Not only schools close down and the students take a bit of rest and some celebrate their graduation, but everybody looks at Christmas and a few days of holiday as a new start inspired by the celebration of the

birth of Jesus. Papua New Guinea witnessed a change in government and the emerging of new leaders this year. As expected, this was accompanied by great hope in renewed attitudes and policies especially at the level of the country's political leadership: honest and effective planning of projects and administration of funds; stamping out of corruption; more equal distribution of resources and improvement of services for the remote areas; housing for the poor and the middle class, and not only wide roads for Port Moresby; final departure of all asylum seekers and refugees so unwisely brought into Papua New Guinea by Australia in 2013, and subject to indescribable psychological torture and medical neglect.

The daunting tasks should not be a reason for discouragement. Citizens always support a government open and accountable to them. Unfortunately we still observe that too many letters and emails addressed to heads of departments and ministers go unanswered. The improvement of communication with

citizens and stakeholders instead boosts government action and rakes in support, expertise and actual work. At Christmas we celebrate being a community and a family. This can only be seen in an effort for unity, cooperation, solidarity, mutual support, forgiveness, and closeness of individual and groups. The possible birth of Bougainville as a nation highlights the common longing for independence and respect. It should also guaranty a more meaningful dialogue and cooperation with the already existing nations in the same area of the Pacific, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, for the good of individuals and communities who have so much in common.

Our Catholic Bishops Conference, which extends from Daru and Kiunga (PNG) to Auki (SI) through Bougainville, will certainly continue to think and to act beyond barriers and boundaries.

To all Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year 2020!

## Australian Bishop visits refugees in PNG - Nigel Akuani

**Port Moresby:** Australian Catholic Bishop from the Diocese of Paramatta His Excellency, Bp Vincent Long OFM, was part of a 7-member religious delegation from Australia that visited refugees in PNG.

The delegation included Bp Vincent, Fr Peter Smith of the Archdiocese of Sydney, Fr Tom McDonough from the Holy Spirit Province, Fr Gerry Heffernan, Sr Mary-Clare Holland a representative from Sisters of Eastern Australia, Mr. Josh Lourensz National Coordinator of Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), and Carolina Gottardo Co-convenor of CAPSA and Director of Jesuit Refugee Service(JRS).

Bp Vincent said he was grateful for his visit to PNG, but admitted his concern and sympathy for the refugee's and asylum seekers being held in the country. He made the testimony during an evaluation and planning discussion on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> November at the Catholic Bishops Conference in Gordons. "It has

been an opportunity to meet some of them and I am moved by their experience and story of suffering," he said. He added, "It was a chance to express our solidarity with them and convey the support, prayers, and good will of the people of Australia to them. The solidarity of our fellow Australians is very strong and we were able to represent the good nature of Australians, the great tradition we have in caring for migrants and refugees with those here in PNG". Bp Vincent recalled his visits to the refugee residences around Port Moresby and said the situation did not seem to appease the refugees being held. While in Australia he heard of the plight from refugees in PNG. However, having met some of them, he described the reality of the situation as 'dehumanizing'.

He urged the local Catholic Church and the Catholic Bishops Conference of PNGSI to continue in its efforts of humanitarian assistance and assured the



future support of the Australia Catholic Bishops Conference and its Catholic communities to help those suffering. The group during their stay also discussed relationships and cooperation between CBCPNGSI and Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) on Social Justice - Mission and Service, and other issues of common concern in the Pacific region.

## Importance of family dialogue - Nigel Akuani



**Port Moresby:** Constant and meaningful dialogue in families is essential to building relationships. This was the chief message raised by the Vicar General of the Catholic Diocese of Goroka, Fr Piotr Michalski MSF, at the Diocesan Catholic Family Life Coordinators (DCFL) annual workshop held from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November. Fr

Piotr stressed the importance of creating and maintaining dialogue in families and said that the best dialogue occurred when in prayer with children and family members. "When we have children present during prayer, we tend to feel the need to set a good example. This is when we open our heart and speak from it," he said. Dialogue through prayer helped improve understanding in relationships as it contained love and wisdom from God. In highlighting the negatives, he said, "A family that lacks close dialogue or communication amongst its members would often isolate themselves from the rest of the family". He said the session on Marriage Enrichment was previously introduced in Madang and Goroka. It left participants requesting for similar sessions.

Workshop Facilitator and National Family Life Commission Secretary MSI, Sr Lucy D'Souza, said the workshop was vital for Family Life Coordinators to better enable them counsel families and couples in their diocese. She said every family deserved to live in peace and joy blessed by the Holiness of God.

Fifteen Diocesan Family Life Coordinators from round the country are attended the workshop. The participants were sisters, religious and laity. The workshop dealt with the family and the role of the Clergy, Religious and laity in the functioning of Catholic families.

## Called to a radical change of life - Fr. Ambrose Pereira sdb

The Catholic Professionals Society PNG celebrated the closing of the year 2019 with a Thanksgiving Eucharistic celebration at St. Charles Lwanga parish, Gerehu on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

Sir John Cardinal Ribat, MSC, DD, Archbishop of Port Moresby was the main celebrant at the Eucharistic celebration, concelebrated by 4 priests, with the Catholic professionals and a large number of lay faithful. Among the professionals were two former PNG Ambassadors Jean Kekedo, Gabriel Dusava and Max Rai, the current PNG Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. Speaking to the congregation at the homily, Cardinal John congratulated the Catholic Professionals for leading the laity to an expression of their faith. "The Laity express their life in the parish and in the diocese by witnessing to their faith in union with Our Lord and with one another", he said. He reminded them of the St Andrew, the Saint of the day and Bl. Peter ToRot. Both were called to a radical change of life.

Mr. Paul Harricknen thanked the Catholic professionals, their families and all gathered for the three major events of the year – Peta ToRot novena, Seminar on *Laudato Si* at UPNG and the Corporate Dinner with the Bishops and the Prime Minister.



Two major events that have been postponed to 2020 were the Laity Convention and the Catholic Expo. A delicious meal and fellowship then followed in the parish hall. Items ushering the Christmas spirit filled the atmosphere with joy and happiness.

# Make a difference. Fight HIV AIDS

- Bp Rolando Santos CM

The Diocese of Alotau celebrated World HIV AIDS day, ahead of its actual celebration on 1st December.

The staff of Star of Hope and the HIV AIDS Centre of the Diocese of Alotau headed the awareness march to places where most people gathered: the wharf, town plaza and marketplace. They shouted slogans like: "Make a difference. Fight HIV AIDS."

In his speech, Bp. Rolando Santos said that they are doing this not to scare people but to give them hope. PNG has the highest incidence of HIV AIDS in the whole of Oceania. However, this can be reversed if we exercise greater self-discipline, social responsibility, love for family and community, and respect for God's laws.

He said that the Church is not discouraging or condemning sex, which is the primary way through which HIV AIDS is mostly transmitted. Rather, the Church wants people to exercise responsible sex and enjoy it as God wants it to be. Sex is beautiful, created by God and sacred. What makes it ugly and destructive is when it is used outside of the plan of God. Bp. Santos said that sex should only be used within

marriage, and not outside of marriage or before marriage. Having multiple sexual partners with those we do not personally know, can endanger our life and health and those of our spouses and children.

Bp. Santos also spoke against the myth that condoms and contraceptives can protect oneself from HIV AIDS. A Harvard research showed no evidence to this. Rather, the use of condoms and other contraceptives can even worsen the situation as seen in several countries like Thailand since it emboldens the user to take greater risk of engaging oneself in irresponsible and illegitimate sex and increase the risk of getting HIV AIDS or transmitting it to one's sexual partner. If a person doubts whether she has acquired the virus, then she should go to Star of Hope or one of the centres for testing and counselling. If the test is positive, she should refrain from having sex so as not to contaminate others, especially one's spouse. If it is negative, she can enjoy sex with her married spouse without fear. Bp Santos encouraged the public to take the test without fear of having their identity known. He also encouraged them to be faithful in following God's commandments and not engage in sex



outside of marriage. We should fight not only HIV AIDS but also adultery, fornication, prostitution, pornography, sexual violence against women and treating persons as objects of pleasure. We should start educating our children and teach them moral discipline, the beauty of love, the sacredness of sex and the exercise of responsible sex within marriage. Purity, chastity and self-discipline based on the holy fear of God and respect for God's laws, and not the condom, is the best protection to HIV AIDS and the way to truly enjoy sex as God wants it to be.

# Laity coordinators reminded of mission's significance

- Nigel Akuani



**Port Moresby:** Twenty Laity coordinators from Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands were reminded of their mission in the Church and Society as it is their noble vocation.

A week-long Laity Workshop for Laity Coordinators entitled, 'Our Catholic Laity: Holy

and Formed for Mission' was held from 25th to 29th November at the Catholic Bishops Conference. According to the facilitator of the Workshop and Secretary of the Laity Commission, Eva Wangihama, the purpose of the workshop was to advocate to the coordinators to make their structured approaches more parish-orientated rather than diocesan-based.

"Programs should start at the level of the community and move to the parish

level. There should be the involvement of the people right from the grassroots. From family to community, community to the parish and the parish to the level of the diocese," she said. Lessons covered in the workshop included Re-echoing the Missiological Symposium, Word of God in lay formation, Social Teaching of the

Catholic Church, State of lay formation in dioceses with their opportunities and challenges, and the Pontifical Mission Society in Diocese Missionary Cooperation. The participants also shared in panel discussions, presentations, recommendations and an evaluation of the lessons. The workshop also had two external facilitators from the East Asia Pastoral Institute in Philippines, Carmencita Rojas a Consecrated Lay person and a Theology Professor Dr Dennis Gonzales.

Ms. Rojas described the occasion as a convenient method in learning from each other. She expressed her gratitude for the hospitality shown and said she was open to returning to PNG in future to attend similar laity training programs.

As a result of the workshop, the participating Lay Coordinators are expected to integrate their new learning and re-echo the key ideas to their dioceses. They will draft a simple, realistic plan of action to share with their team in the diocese.

# New pastoral buildings for the Diocese of Mendi

- Moses Ben

**Mendi:** The Diocese of Mendi celebrated the blessing and opening of several pastoral buildings that had been destroyed in the 2018 earthquake disaster.

The newly renovated and expanded church together with four other structures were rebuilt at Saint Martin De Porres Parish, Pomberel, Southern Highlands Province. The event was celebrated on Sunday, 9th November with the Bishop of Mendi, Bp Donald Lippert, OFM Cap, as the main

celebrant. Several priests joined him at the Eucharistic concelebration. Present also were religious Brothers and Sisters, catechists, local leaders, invited guests and lay faithful. In his homily the bishop told the people that their newly renovated church was a sign that God is very close to the people with love, protection, mercy and strength. He also reminded the joyful assembly that all baptised people have the dignity of being temples of the Holy Spirit and together constitute the church and are therefore called to share the Good News with everyone. Parish priest Fr Peter Seo of the Korean Mission Society thanked all of those who participated in the rebuilding project, especially the chair of the Parish Pastoral Council, Paul Pelumel. He also thanked the bishop for his support and generous assistance in securing funds to renovate the church and the newly constructed buildings that were destroyed by the 7.5 magnitude earthquake on 26 February 2018.



Many pastoral, educational and health facilities are still in need of rebuilding across the Southern Highlands Province and Hela Province. Over thousands of people from the parish and its outstations as well as from different Christian denominations came together to celebrate and witness the joyful occasion.

## Catholic Reporter

Invites you to send in your articles, photograph and reflections on events and happenings in your parish, community, institution and diocese.

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