Melanesian Stories

Marist Brothers in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

1845 - 2003

Lawrence McCane fms
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and the Pacific
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About the Author

A Marist Brother since 1967, Lawrence McCane worked for twenty-three years in Australian schools before beginning a second career in Papua New Guinea in 1997, first in Bougainville during the final years of the Bougainville Crisis and later at Sixteen Mile and Madang. Educated at Gumlu State School, Marist high schools in Ayr and Mittagong, Macquarie University in Sydney and later Loyola University Chicago, he firmly believes that “educators create the future” and that the Marist education charism can enrich the teaching profession in all cultures. He wrote Melanesian Stories both as a tribute to the Marist pathfinders in PNGSI and as a way of recognizing and encouraging the new generation of Melanesian Marist educators. In 2004 Lawrence McCane is a teacher at St Francis Xavier’s College, Hamilton, Australia.

The author at Tsiroge with students from Torokina, 1998
Preface

Stories are part of life. In every culture, given the right opportunity, people love to tell stories. In Melanesia, where oral aspects of the cultures are still strong, storytelling has the important roles of explaining why things are so, passing on time-honoured customs, confirming land ownership and educating the young into adulthood. No one begins life with nothing; each of us has a history that we learn about through the power of story.

The purpose of this book is to relate the Marist Brothers' story in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, from the arrival of the French Brothers in Solomon Islands in 1845 to the formation of the District of Melanesia in 2003. In researching this book, I interviewed eighty people: Brothers, former Brothers, ex-students and others who were part of many of the events described in this story. Extracts from these recorded interviews, liberally scattered throughout, add some elements of an oral history to this work. I had access to the Marist Brothers Archives in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sydney and Melbourne, which provided a wealth of letters, reports, annals and photographic material used in the book. I obtained further material by correspondence with people who were part of the story. In almost every case, my enquiries received an enthusiastic response. The result is something of a family history, created by many people, which tells of our origins, the achievements of the past and our hopes for the future. While many have contributed, I am responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation, and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Marist Brothers.

In shaping many diverse stories from such a long time span into a unified narrative, I found it necessary to select and edit, abbreviate and simplify. This is a sample of stories from our past, rather than a complete history. In general, recent events have a briefer treatment than more distant ones; likewise Brothers recently working in the District of Melanesia feature somewhat less prominently in the book than those of earlier times. By
necessity, the stories of many people, the *silent majority*, were omitted. My hope is that somehow their anonymous contribution lives in these pages.

This book would not be in your hands without the help of many people. To Brother Brendan Nelly, District Leader, goes the credit for initiating this project. This book was his dream and I was delighted when he invited me to bring it to reality. I appreciated the fact that Brendan, while providing many creative suggestions, allowed me the freedom to do it my way, along with the time and resources needed to complete the work. Those who agreed to be interviewed and openly shared their story, including those whose words do not appear here, have contributed greatly to this work. To all of them I express my warm appreciation. Thanks to those who responded to requests for information and patiently answered my numerous clarifying questions.

I was fortunate to have the services of a number of volunteer critical readers, whose perceptive reading of my drafts has greatly improved the quality of the writing now before you. In thanking my proofreaders, I acknowledge the unique contribution of Brother Tony Butler, whose candid suggestions helped me a lot and who agreed to undertake the final proofreading of all twenty-seven chapters. Brother Bertrand Webster's wide knowledge of the District of PNGSI proved to be a great asset. He took an active interest in the project, advised on numerous matters, suggested themes for some of the chapters and checked the index. The publication of the book was financed by Marist Brothers Bureau of International Solidarity (Rome), Marist Brothers Sydney Province, Sir Henry Chow (Lae Biscuit Company) and Sir Peter Barter (Madang Resort). Without their assistance this book would not have been possible.

I thank my Brothers of the Madang Marist community for their encouragement and understanding; only they know the ups and downs I experienced as the book progressed. Finally, this story is the product of seven years of living among Papua New Guineans, the fruit of coming to know something of the extraordinary diversity of PNG and Solomon Island cultures, and forming lifelong friendships with Melanesian people
who have enriched my life. In particular, I thank the young men who have committed themselves to the Marist Brothers’ way of life. They are the future and this is their story.

Lawrence McCane fms
24 January 2004
Introduction

Sydney, Australia
1952

The view from the small window of the Catalina Flying Boat as it approached the Harbour was stunning. Night had fallen. The lights of the city extended beyond the horizon like sparkling jewels. This was a sight too much to take in for young Henry and his three companions as they craned to get a clearer view of Sydney on this, their first trip to Australia. It was the first time that any of the young men had been away from their home island of Bougainville. The tone of the engines changed as the calm waters of Rose Bay came closer and the city lights became clearer. With a splash the Catalina touched down and cruised towards the terminal. It was Friday, 7 November, 1952.

The four bewildered Bougainville boys left the aircraft and wandered into the terminal, where they were met by Brother Andrew Power, whom they already knew from his visits to their island as Provincial of the Marist Brothers. With Andrew was Brother Quentin Duffy, the Headmaster of St. Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, a school which shared its name with the boys' own school in Rigu, Central Bougainville. Quentin was the boys' host that evening.

Henry was entranced by the lights of the city as they drove westwards towards Hunters Hill. On arrival at the Mark Street gates of the College, he was struck by the size and grandeur of the huge sandstone building in front of him. “My goodness, this is the tallest building in Australia, is it?” he asked the Provincial. “Henry, you will see much bigger buildings than this one tomorrow.”

Quentin took Henry and his companions into a dormitory near the College chapel, which had been completed only twelve years earlier. The chapel was bigger and much grander than any church in Bougainville. The school holidays had begun and the dormitory was vacant. Not surprisingly, Henry didn't sleep well that first night in
Australia. Years later, he explained the bed was too soft, and he would have preferred the hard boards and his sleeping mat back in Togoikori Village in Siwai, south-west Bougainville.

The following day the three young men took a train (another new experience) to Bowral in the New South Wales Southern Highlands, where the Juniorate, La Valla, was located. The Juniorate was a preparatory school for young men intending to join the Brothers. There they met the other juniors, including three young men from the South Solomons, one of whom was Benedito Laumanasa (later Brother Alphonsus, who died in 1967). Some weeks later, they were joined by three more Solomon Islanders, including Edwin Meresininhinua, who died in 2001 and is buried beside Alphonsus at Tenaru. A year later they were joined by two more Bougainvillean aspirants, John Paul Mauro and Joseph Pulau. The number of Bougainvillean aspirants in Australia was then six, with another six from the South Solomons (Solomon Islands).

Henry Kangku was eighteen years of age when he arrived in Sydney, his mind full of youthful enthusiasm and excitement as he began this new life, the beginning of his Marist journey. It was a courageous step. As his future unfolded, Henry would return to work among his own people, bringing to them the richness of the Marist spirit. In his lifetime he would be Brother and teacher to countless children in community schools, high schools and vocational centres in PNG and Solomons. He would learn to be a formator and assist with the formation of young aspirants in the postulancy and novitiate. He would see at first hand the changes taking place on his island as development came. He would become a victim of the Bougainville crisis (1989-1998), forced to flee into the bush, out of contact with his Brothers for two years at the height of the fighting. It was to be a richly rewarding life of service. Henry's story is one of many.

That memorable arrival in Sydney in 1952 was also the beginning of Henry's journey into a previously unseen world of western culture. Regrettably, he would not see his home island again until the end of
1961, nine years later. By then, he was a professed Marist Brother, with a new name, Bernard Kangku.

Not only his name had changed. Henry, along with his companions, experienced a strange mixture of emotions on his return to the simple village life of Bougainville. He was now educated, sophisticated, westernized. His people respected him as a leader and a religious and genuinely rejoiced at his return, but they noticed that something important had changed. Henry was different now, different inside. He had gained something and lost something. In all the planning that had gone into preparing the young men for arrival in Australia, no one had
anticipated the difficulty of return. They had to re-learn their own culture which they had lost while they took on Australia's western ways. In many respects, returning was harder than leaving. The pain of that cultural confusion always remained with our pioneering Brothers. That part of our story lies in the pages ahead.

This book tells the stories of those pioneering Melanesian Brothers, Henry Kangku (Brother Bernard), John Paul Mauro, Edwin Meresinihinua, Alphonsus Laumanasa and others. No less, it is the story of the many generous Melanesian men who have followed them in the way of Champagnat, the founder of the Marist Brothers. It is the story of how the Australian Marists, helped by other Brothers from far-off lands, brought the story of Champagnat to Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea and, in doing so, have discovered for themselves the richness of the cultures of these countries. In these pages you will find the stories of Melanesian Brothers and those who came from distant countries to live with them as their guests, their co-workers, their Brothers. It is the story of how the Melanesian cultures have encountered western culture in the context of Marist life and ministry. It is a story shaped by the dramatic events of the Second World War (1939-1945), the Bougainville crisis (1989-1998) and the Solomon Island tensions (2000-2003).

With all its frustrations and delights, cultural mistakes and heroic generosity, this is our story of Marist Brotherhood in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea from 1835 to 2003. *Stori bilong yumi.*
Chapter 1

The Mission Begins
1835-1938

The Founder of the Marist Brothers was a French Marist priest, Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840). We know from Champagnat’s letters and life story that he himself felt a keen desire to travel with his confreres to the distant lands of Oceania to work as a missionary. In fact he volunteered for this work, which Pope Gregory XVI assigned to the Marist group in 1836. Marcellin's life story tells us he “wanted to devote his last days and little remaining strength” to the peoples of Oceania. Bishop Pompallier and his group of Marists left France in December 1836, just a few years before Marcellin's death. At that time the Founder was fully occupied trying to obtain Government recognition for his fast-growing Institute, and caring for more than 170 Brothers spread throughout thirty-four establishments in five dioceses. By that time too, his health was deteriorating. Reluctantly, he accepted the advice of his superior, Father Colin, who asked him to stay in France with his Brothers rather than go to Oceania.

Instead, Champagnat selected three of his Brothers to accompany the first Marist Fathers to the Pacific and in 1838 and 1839 he sent six more Brothers to the Marist Oceania missions. Over the following twenty years, thirty-four Marist Brothers worked in the scattered outposts of the Pacific. Marcellin's correspondence to Bishop Pompallier and his regular mention of the missionary work in his letters to the Brothers show Marcellin's passion to bring the message of the Gospel to new lands. “Our plans include all the dioceses of the world,” he wrote in 1837. The Founder died in 1840.

Problems Faced by Early Marists – The Missionaries Depart

The Founder, with all the French Marists, was enthusiastic about the Oceania project. Yet, in Western Oceania the mission had a catastrophic beginning, resulting in the withdrawal of the Marists from Solomons
Islands in 1847, less than two years after their arrival. A combination of tropical diseases and disastrous relationships with the local people forced the eventual evacuation of the few sickly missionaries who had survived the ravages of malaria and hostilities with the villagers. During their brief presence in the region, they established temporary missions on San Cristobal (Solomons), Woodlark Island (Muyuw) near the Trobriands in what is now Milne Bay Province of PNG, and Rooke Island (Umboi), in what is now Morobe Province, PNG. The Marists left Woodlark in November 1853. Woodlark and Rooke Island missions struggled on for a further three years with Italian missionaries, but they too were beaten by malaria and their inability to form successful relationships with the Islanders.

With the advantage of hindsight we can see the tragic waste of that failed first mission, no doubt motivated by deep faith in the gospel imperative to evangelise the world, but tarnished by colonialism, and a belief that our people in Melanesia were inferior and primitive. Several missionaries fell victim to violent acts, provoked by a desire to protect land, customs and traditional beliefs, or in retaliation for perceived wrongs. It was only when the authentic Marist vision of equality, respect and good relationships prevailed that the missionaries found that they were welcome in these lands. It was a hard-learned lesson.

The First Brothers - Death and Other Disasters

Among the first Marist Brothers to set foot in what is now Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea were Brothers Hyacinth Chatelet, Gennade Rolland, Aristide Brun and Optat Bergillon. It is uncertain whether Brother Optat was one of Champagnat's teaching Brothers (FMS) or a “coadjutor” Brother with the Society of Mary (SM) – either way, his story is worth telling. These were among the group of seven priests, four Marist Brothers (FMS) and two SM Brothers, under the leadership of Bishop Epalle SM who left London in February 1845 for Sydney, Australia, on the way to Solomon Islands. Ten days after arriving, Epalle was dead, killed on Santa Isabel Island on 16 December 1845. Epalle's missionaries had befriended and traded with one group of islanders; then, unfortunately, they ignored advice that they should
not immediately approach a nearby rival group. That group killed Bishop Epalle with an axe, when his party landed near their village some days later. The Sydney Province necrology records that Brother Gennade was in the landing party with Epalle when he was attacked, but that is not supported by other historians. All four of our FMS Brothers probably remained on the ship, the *Marian Watson*, anchored nearby, but out of sight.

Sixteen months later, on 20 April 1847, Brother Hyacinth, with two priests, was killed, also by axe, on San Cristobal Island, where the missionaries had opened their first mission after Bishop Epalle's death.

After the evacuation from San Cristobal in September 1847, Brothers Optat, Gennade and Aristide helped to set up the short-lived mission on Woodlark Island. Later, Optat was transferred to Rooke Island, where
Bishop Collomb SM (Epalle's replacement) and Father Villien SM contracted malaria and died, leaving Optat and Father Fremont alone, until they were evacuated back to Woodlark in May 1849.

Woodlark was not a happy place for our FMS Brothers, indeed, for any of the missionaries there. In June 1849, Aristide returned to Sydney, after a long running quarrel with the superior, Father Montrouzier SM, who, in the face of failure to befriend the islanders, imposed a stricter monastic timetable on his already discouraged and sick Brothers. Montrouzier's rule was oppressive and, in the situation, inhumane. On one occasion he refused to give out any food except bananas for ten days as a penance.

Optat's reaction to Montrouzier's regime was to go walkabout. It was not long before he was attracted to some of the local young girls. Montrouzier reacted by building a great fence around the house to keep the girls away. Apparently, his plan was not successful. Finally, Optat too returned to Sydney in September 1850, leaving Gennade as the last FMS in the region. Gennade left Woodlark in 1852.

**Did They Come for the Wrong Reasons?**

The religious motivation of the early missionaries is undoubted, but perhaps it was misguided. From the Vatican down, there was an unholy haste to establish the “true faith” in the Islands before the arrival of “the heretics” (Protestant missionaries). The Marist Bishop of Fiji wrote in 1891 that the Marists should consider an early return to the Solomons for “fear of seeing the Protestants go first to plough their furrow in the soil soaked with the blood of Marist martyrs.” The race for souls was on. The early missionaries had learned from the Council of Trent that “outside the Church there is no salvation”. They did not have the benefit of the more informed insights of Vatican Council II, which was to reform the Church a century later. This ugly competition between the various Christian denominations, and to a lesser extent between the different nationalities and religious orders within the Catholic Church, continued over the following decades. The missionaries’ haste to beat the Protestants and their zeal to evangelise the Islanders showed little
understanding of the huge practical problems they were likely encounter in Melanesia. Their complete ignorance of Melanesian culture was of little concern to them.

The early Marists' understanding of the purpose of mission was primarily that it was a means of personal sanctification. The missionaries' daily timetable was determined by their almost monastic prayer schedule, allowing only short visits to the villages. The difficulties encountered were often welcomed as a means of holiness. In line with the spirituality of the time, some even had a desire to die as a martyr. In all of this, one wonders where the best interests of the Islanders fitted into the complex mix of questionable motivations – following and supporting colonial empires, promoting Roman Catholicism and minimizing the growth of other Churches, the personal spiritual growth of the missionaries themselves, and, for some, the lure of a perceived adventurous missionary life in exotic islands on the other side of the world.

These comments do not detract from the sterling work done by the Marist Fathers on their return to this part of the Pacific. Both in Solomon Islands and Bougainville, Marist Fathers, Sisters and Brothers have a long history of working together. Over more than a century the Marist Priests, assisted by the Brothers and Marist Missionary Sisters, have given the Church, on Bougainville and elsewhere, a distinct and authentic Marial character. In spite of the inauspicious beginning, the Marists have the distinction of being the Founders of the Western Oceania mission and in later years established extensive education and health services, as well as ministering to spiritual needs. Unlike other groups, they never established huge central mission headquarters, preferring to put more of their personnel into remote areas – a strategy which was successful in Bougainville and Solomon Islands.

“Blackbirding” in the Solomons

Missionary work in the Solomons and elsewhere was indirectly handicapped by the practice known as “Blackbirding”, which began in the 1860s. Between 1863 and 1904, 19,000 Solomon Islanders, along with Bougainvilleans, Vanuatuans and other Pacific islanders, were
“recruited” by unscrupulous traders and ship captains, often by force, to leave their homeland to work on the sugar plantations of Northern Queensland. It is estimated that 63,000 Pacific Islanders were shipped to Queensland in that period and many suffered in harsh conditions under tyrannical or unjust plantation owners. While contributing enormously to the wealth of the young Queensland colony, the recruits received small wages or, in some cases, no wage at all. Some people have said the so-called “labour trade” offered many advantages to the islanders. Furthermore, some Church people, especially Evangelicals, hold the view that it was a Christianising influence. It is true that many workers went to Queensland willingly, and some were looked on as “men of status” by those back in the Solomons. It is clear, however, that many were ill-informed and the damage done by the trade far outweighed any benefits.

The Queensland Government's own investigation into this human trade concluded that blackbirding was “a terrible indictment of deceit, cruelty, treachery, deliberate kidnapping and cold-blooded murder” (Royal Commission, 1885). While not directly part of our story, this shameful part of colonial history influenced the early relationship between Australia and the Solomons and partly explains the suspicion the Islanders had towards Europeans during early missionary times.

**Another Beginning**

The Marist Fathers returned to the Solomons in 1898. Four Priests, a Brother and some catechists landed on Rua Sura, near Guadalcanal, and, amid great difficulties, began their mission. The growth of that work is a story in itself. Their success second time round can be attributed to the growing familiarity of Islanders with visiting traders, to the fact that missionaries had had more experience in Melanesia, and to an ample supply of quinine. By the time our Brothers arrived forty years later, the Marist Fathers had established thriving missions at several locations around Guadalcanal and other islands.

Marist Fathers had also begun missions in nearby Bougainville. They began at Tunuru, just north of Kieta in Central Bougainville in 1901,
founding a mission base at nearby Tubiana (Rigu) in 1904. They expanded from there to several locations along the coast, both northwards and southwards. By the turn of the century, vigorous mission stations had opened throughout what was to become PNG. British New Guinea in the south (Papua) had a station on Yule Island, conducted by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who were already established near Rabaul in New Britain. The Divine Word Missionaries, who moved their Headquarters to Alexishafen, near Madang, in 1905, served German New Guinea in the north. Like Vunapope near Rabaul, Alexishafen was to develop into a huge mission complex.

In all four of these major centres of Church activity (Bougainville, Rabaul, Alexishafen and Yule Island) the early 1900s was a period of consolidation and growth. Relationships with the local people improved and the missionaries slowly developed a better understanding of the cultures in which they worked. Local people were trained as catechists, an initiative which became an essential part of the Church's missionary plan. During this period the missions' schools, catechist training centres and medical services began to flourish. Significantly, the missionaries learned and used local languages in their work. Similar developments were occurring in the Church in Solomon Islands.

An Invitation to the Australians

This expansion of Church activity created a demand for more Religious. In 1935, the newly appointed Marist Vicar Apostolic of the Solomons, Bishop Jean Marie Aubin, sought teaching Brothers to staff his school at Marau on Guadalcanal, already functioning under the leadership of Father Moore SM. While in New Zealand for his consecration, Bishop Aubin met the Marist Brothers' New Zealand Provincial who advised him to write to the Superior General in Rome to ask for Brothers. As a result the Australian Province, led at that time by Brother Andrew Power, was asked to supply Brothers for Solomon Islands Mission.

When Andrew asked for mission volunteers from his Province, a large number responded, from whom he selected Brothers John William Roberts (Director), James Thrift (Sub Director) and Ephrem Stevens to
open the first Marist Brothers' community in Solomon Islands. [The Director is the leader of the community.] All three generously accepted the invitation and were excited at the prospect of being the pioneers in this significant step which would eventually lead to the establishment of the District of PNG/SI. They had no idea of the adventures, the joys, the challenges, the hardships and the sacrifices that lay ahead.
Chapter 2

Arrival at Marau, Solomon Islands

1938

Brothers John William Roberts, James Thrift and Ephrem Stevens arrived in Solomon Islands on 2 August 1938 after a sea journey of ten days from Sydney. They landed at Tulagi in the Florida group, between Guadalcanal and Malaita, the Administrative Centre for the British-controlled territory, about fifty kilometres north of the present-day capital, Honiara. Father De Klerk SM met them there and introduced them to Bishop Aubin.

British Administration

The British set up Tulagi as the capital of the protectorate after their decision in 1893 to annex the islands as the “British Solomon Island Protectorate”. The name “protectorate” reflects the British belief that their rule was designed to protect the islands from the notorious activities of whalers, traders and blackbirders over the previous fifty years. The British motivation, however, was not entirely unselfish. They were colonials who wanted to extend their empire and protect their Pacific interests. Other colonial nations, notably Germany and France, were doing likewise in the region. History, however, will probably judge that the British regime promoted development in the Solomons in appropriate ways. Although the methods of the authorities were sometimes harsh, their presence brought stability and peace to the Islands, and the infamous activities of the blackbirders and traders were curtailed. This new climate was partly the reason why the missionaries were able to return to the Solomons in 1898.

First Days in the Solomons

By the early 1930s Tulagi had grown into a small but thriving government and commercial centre. As was common in Pacific settlements, many
Chinese traders had set up businesses, and Tulagi's ragged collection of stores became known as “Chinatown”. It was here that the Brothers purchased replacement clothing for the heavy black clerical garb in which they had been outfitted in Sydney. Brother John wrote briefly in the annals: “In afternoon visit Chinatown to make necessary purchases, especially clothing, for we are badly prepared.” Later, Brother James wrote that light underwear, cork helmets, light raincoats and umbrellas were on the shopping list. They had arrived on a wet day and had never experienced the stifling humidity and torrential rains that are typical of Solomon Islands’ weather.

The following day, with the Bishop, they met the British Commissioner, Mr. A.H. Ashley, and, later that afternoon boarded the mission vessel *Hambia* for a journey of some fifty kilometres to the main mission station, Visale, on the northwestern tip of nearby Guadalcanal Island. James mentions that they found the heat and humidity in those first few
days oppressive. “Rain and real heat are vivid recollections. Rolling perspiration during the bedtime hours and little sleep as a result produced that tired feeling.”

At Visale the newcomers had their first experience of life on a mission station. It was an impressive collection of buildings, bigger than Tulagi. The Visale church, the only stone building in Solomon Islands, was a fine structure built in 1910. There the remains of Bishop Epalle, retrieved from San Jorge Island in 1900 by the redoubtable Father Rouillac, were preserved. The Bishop's house was nearby, as well as the convent and novitiate of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, a local Congregation of Sisters, founded by Bishop Aubin's predecessor, Bishop Raucaz, in 1932. Raucaz was a practical man and was largely responsible for the fine establishment at Visale, which also boasted a printery, a water supply and an electric light system. In 1942 American bombs destroyed the Visale mission station, after the Japanese took over its fine facilities for use as a hospital camp.

After two days there the Brothers sailed south to another station, Tangarare, where they stayed for seventeen days. The purpose of this visit was to begin to learn the language of the mission. Tangarare is the place of the Gari language, which was used among the plantation workers at that time as the common language of trade, and also as the mission language. About seventy languages were spoken in Solomon Islands, making it necessary for the missionaries to learn Gari, the most commonly used language at the time. Many Solomon Islanders knew some of that language, in addition to their own. The Marists had hoped that Gari would be the language spoken throughout all their missions on Guadalcanal. While that was never achieved, it served a useful purpose for a number of years in extending communication across the island, and in promoting contact among different language groups.

The three Brothers enthusiastically began learning Gari, which the Marist Fathers had attempted to establish in both written and spoken form. They had developed a dictionary of about 2000 words, as well as prayer books, sections of the scriptures and a catechism. Later, the Brothers themselves added to those language resources. Language lessons would
continue at Marau with Father Moore's assistance. During the stay at Tangarare the main water supply pipe broke and there was no water for the mission. James, always the practical man, assisted with the repair.

The School at Marau

Over these days of orientation, the Brothers learned something of their school at Makina on Marau Sound. (Both names, Makina and Marau, are variously used to refer to the mission located at Marau Sound). Makina had first opened as a mission in 1904. Bishop Aubin had set up a catechist school there in 1936, seeking to give a basic education to future village leaders. It was a two-year course, and only literate boys, aged between fourteen and eighteen, were enrolled. The curriculum included English (the language of instruction), catechism, crafts and garden skills. By 1938 there were about fifty students at the school.

The journey to Marau, the scene of the Brothers' labours for the next five years, took them to the eastern extremity of Guadalcanal island, 150 kilometres distant, about twenty hours' journey on the *Hambia*, with a brief stopover at Ruavatu, another mission station eighty kilometres east of Visale. "Sea not good. Journey uninteresting and rough" notes John in his annals, however, on their arrival, conditions improved: “Put into Sound. Very calm and pretty.”
As they sailed into Marau Sound, the sun was sinking behind the mainland. The numerous islands and channels, bathed in soft light from the setting sun, made a spectacular sight. They noticed neat villages on some of the islands, attractive beaches with numerous coconut palms. Approaching their landfall, they could make out a few of the mission buildings, and, beyond, on the right, a heavily timbered mountain range disappearing into the distance. The Sound itself was well protected, with many reefs visible nearby.

What were the thoughts of John, Ephrem and James as the *Hambia* cruised gently towards the small wharf? It was a significant moment. The Marist Brothers had arrived at their new home in Solomon Islands. It was Tuesday, 23 August 1938.
Chapter 3

Rumours of War
Makina Mission, Marau Sound
1938-1941

Brother John's Annals record the details of the first night at Marau. It was a busy evening. Brother Michael SM greeted the new arrivals and led them from the wharf through a coconut plantation to the school buildings where Father Moore had lined up his forty-two students, who welcomed the Brothers “with shouts and song”. They went directly to the church, where prayers to the Holy Spirit and to Mary were recited, followed by night prayers, complete with homily. A meal was served, after which the boys sang more songs of welcome. Bishop Aubin, who had accompanied the Brothers on the Hambia, “makes in French a beautiful little speech. Brother Director [i.e., the writer, John himself] replies in English. Father Moore translates for the boys.”

The following day the Brothers had a chance to explore the mission. Unlike the older stations, Marau had no permanent buildings. The floors were timber, while the walls and roof were of sago palm leaf, commonly used for buildings throughout the Solomons. The leaf panels which form the roof and walls deteriorated with age and needed to be replaced every few years. The building skills of the islanders produced attractive houses which were cool and weatherproof. After arranging their house, the Brothers relaxed with a swim in a nearby spring, and were entertained by the students' traditional dancing.

School Begins at Marau

A few days later, Brs John and Ephrem began teaching, finding the students “attentive and intelligent”. Meanwhile, Brother James, with his small kit of tools, assisted Brother Michael SM in the construction of better classroom accommodation. “It was strange not being able to find even an old bolt around the place,” he comments. By December
they were able to move into the new school, the former building becoming a “hobby house”. James was a regular customer when the Chinese traders called at Marau, with all kinds of merchandise packed onto their small boats. Other boats brought occasional mail, which informed the Brothers of the latest Australian cricket scores, and, ominously, rumours of the European war.

And so the busy life at Marau went on. The Brothers were fully occupied in teaching, language learning and building construction. Slowly they began to understand something of the culture of this strange new land. Yet, like most missionaries at that time, sensitivity to the culture was not one of their major priorities. Their writings contain examples of colonial attitudes and lack of awareness of cultural matters. They were men of their time and these were early days. On the other hand, the Brothers brought with them the Marist tradition of developing good
relationships with their students, and for this they earned respect from the locals. Brother John wrote that the boys were “patient” with the mistakes the Brothers made.

A year after arrival, on 24 August 24 1939, Brother John wrote in a letter to Australia:

Yesterday was the anniversary of our advent to this place. Just one year ago! I cannot tell you how timid I felt as I came up the coconut grove and thought of the responsibility of directing the first Marist school in the Solomons. I didn't know the language or customs, etc. However, by now things have smoothed themselves out and I feel as at home now as I was in Australian schools - the prayers no doubt of our many friends.

The Brothers' great achievement was an effective combination of academic studies with the development of the boys' own traditional skills in building, gardening and fishing. Brother Ephrem wrote:

Having boys from all islands in the group, we have great opportunity for promoting the local crafts. Boys are encouraged to make canoes, mats, baskets, bowls, fish traps, ropes, nets etc., as they are made in their own district. Then they teach others and learn new crafts themselves. At the same time they are taught the use and care of modern tools. Some are becoming useful carpenters.

The school's gardens provided food, mostly pana (yam), augmented by fish and rice. John was always looking for ways to save money by using less rice. The boys' canoe-building and net-making skills were put to good use to increase the catch of fish. However, a project to grow rice on the property was less successful.

A Visit to Avuavu

In December 1938 the Brothers were invited by Father Boudard SM to visit the station at Avuavu, some fifty kilometres to the West on the south coast of Guladacanal, the “weather coast”. Avuavu was the first outstation, opened in 1899 as a result of land purchased there by the legendary Father Rouillac, SM, adventurer, superb seaman, rugged individualist, yet an effective missionary. (Rouillac concluded his long and interesting life as the chaplain of the Marist Brothers' Novitiate in Mittagong, Australia, and is buried in the Brothers' cemetery there.)
Boudard spent most of his active life at Avuavu until the Second World War forced his departure in 1942.

John wrote of Boudard:

He has been more than thirty years in the one place. What a missioner! Of late years his eyes have been weak so he was forced to forgo the task of visiting the people in the mountains. This year, however, he has recovered to a large extent the use of his eyes and started once again the job of visiting. His visitations were a royal progress. Village upon village welcomed him in songs specially made for the occasion. He is now with us for a few weeks enjoying a rest. He is as active as a young man and of great influence among locals.

Like many of the early French Marist priests, Boudard, as a young man, had completed two years of compulsory military training in the French army. This experience seemed to increase his esteem in the eyes of the villagers. He wrote in 1909:

One of the first questions which is often asked of you is this, “Have you been a soldier?” Good for you if you can reply affirmatively. You will immediately be classified as a “strong, brave man”. Your prestige will be established … Often people have said to me, “You walk well, you cross rivers in fine style, but then you have been a soldier.”

The Brothers' journey to Avuavu required an epic walk of three days; they were guided by their students and slept overnight at villages en route. One purpose of the visit was to collect a cow, which they named Usa, and her calf, the beginning of the Marau herd. These were taken back to Marau on the return walk. It was the first of many visits to Avuavu and the beginning of a long friendship with Boudard.

School Activities

In March 1939, Father Moore, who had founded the Marau school, departed for Sydney, leaving the three Brothers in sole control of the school. This allowed John to introduce a timetable change which he had not been able to do previously, as Father Moore “did not like too many changes.” Later, Father Van Houte arrived to replace Father Moore.
By this time, the rumours of war in Europe were intensifying. On 4 September 1939 John wrote:

News has come that England has declared war on Germany. For us in the Solomons, this question is a vital one, Where is Japan standing? Maybe our position is unsafe, so we decide to increase the number of working hours to have a good supply of food, should things take an unfavourable turn.

An additional hour of work was added to the afternoon's programme. The daily timetable was:

- Work 7.15 – 9.45
- School 10.15-11.30
- Break
- School 2.00-3.30
- Work 3.30-5.30

After Christmas 1939 there was a visit from a group of boys from an Anglican mission, Alite, for the purpose of a game of cricket. Was this an ecumenical initiative years before its time? John's description of the match suggests otherwise.

A team from Alite came along in full canoes to play us cricket. They were lamentable. The sum total of runs in two innings was barely thirty. Our boy Marseliano, after hitting many sixes, retires honourably, so does Lorensio. It was important that we win, as we are Catholics and they are Anglicans.

1940 saw increased numbers in the school, many improvements to buildings, a new wharf and a large herd of cattle, together with some horses and even a few goats. Sadly Usa died after becoming bogged in a swamp. Part of the holidays that year was spent on nearby Lauvi Island. Most boys stayed with the Brothers during holidays, as travel to their remote home villages was impractical. These interesting excursions to nearby islands became a highlight of the holiday times at Marau, both for the Brothers and the students. One particular picnic had more than its share of adventures: John writes in a letter to a friend in Australia:

We are nearing the end of our scholastic year, such as it is in Solomon Islands, and some of our boys are returning to their villages. To bring the term to a memorable close I called a halt from ordinary work and off we went to an island about two hours' rowing, distant. The object of any picnic, as far as we
are concerned is to catch fish - and catch fish we did! Over 1000 in three days. For some months a few of the boys had been busy making a large net – made by plaiting the inner bark of a tree – and it was this same net that was responsible for most of the haul.

The second night we had a scare. We had already killed one snake, but thought no more of it. While we were saying evening prayers on the beach near a camp fire, I noticed some of the boys looking earnestly in one direction and now and again making an effort to move away. It was during the singing of a hymn to Our Lady, Ave Maria Tinamami (Hail Mary our Mother) that they all stood up while a few of the bigger ones killed a snake that was making its way towards us. Presently the commotion was over and the boys were going off to their little houses to prepare for sleep. Aloisio startled everyone by exclaiming “Ieni kesa” (Here's one). So we killed that one. Further commotion! The boys gradually settled down to rest, many of them preferring to sleep on the sand as a precaution. Joane next raised a shout, as one snake climbed up his leg. That one was killed too. Two more were seen after that but they got away. Quite an adventure. I stayed on the sand talking with the boys until gradually, one by one, sleep overcame them and I left them all sleeping soundly, forgetful of the six snakes. My house was inland 20 or 30 yards and my bed was on the earth floor. I lay down to sleep but no harm befell me, as you see by my letter.

In 1941, through the efforts of Brother Harold Carlson in Australia, a plough to be drawn by bullocks arrived. At first the untrained bullocks frustrated the Brothers' best efforts, but, in time they proved to be a real asset and the gardens were extended.

**An Unexpected Change**

News from overseas was infrequent. The Brothers depended on mail and reports from the visiting mission boats. Throughout 1940 and 1941 John wrote about the occasional reports of German advances across Europe as the war progressed. The war front was far away, yet the frequency and tone of John's war updates in the Annals suggest he had a sense of foreboding of the disaster which was about to envelop their peaceful existence.

During the long mid-year break in 1941, John received news which was of more immediate significance to him. He had decided to go with some of the boys on their return to the island of Malaita and was staying at the mission station at Buma on Langalanga Lagoon when he learned
of radio messages sent several weeks previously by Brother Arcadius, the new Provincial in Sydney. Three Brothers were already sailing for Solomon Islands on M.V. Malaita to work at a school at Chabai on Bougainville Island, North Solomons. John was surprised by that, but the rest of the message really stunned him. He himself had been appointed to head the new community at Chabai, and was to proceed directly with two of the Brothers to Bougainville.

John was not happy. His exasperation shows in the Annals entry of 26 July:

Two radio messages, dated 30 June and 11 July, announcing the opening of North Solomons and appointing John as Director. A very sudden piece of news, especially in the Solomons, where travelling is slow and uncertain. Brother Director hastens to Tulagi to meet the Malaita to see who is on board and what exactly is to be done. No previous notice given.

A week later, on 2 August, three years to the day after the arrival of the first three Brothers in Tulagi, John greeted Brs Augustine Mannes, Donatus Fitzgerald and Ervan McDonough at the same neat Government wharf where he himself had disembarked in 1938. Communication from the Superiors in Sydney had not been good. The three new arrivals had expected that all would be going to Bougainville. They had not been told who their leader was, and certainly did not expect it to be John. No doubt bemused by Arcadius' failure to appoint a Director before departure, the three had suggested among themselves, on the long sea journey, that the most senior of them, Brother Augustine, should be the Director. It is said that they had wanted to go together as a fresh team of three to Bougainville and experience a pioneering beginning, as at Marau, without the help of an experienced Brother. Consequently they were disappointed to discover that Brother Ervan would not be accompanying them to Bougainville.

Having sorted out the mysteries of the decisions made at late notice in far-distant Sydney, the Brothers acted quickly. Two of the Brothers, Augustine and Donatus, would leave for Bougainville the following day. John and Ervan would return to Marau, where John had to finalise
matters before taking the next available steamer to Bougainville. James became Director of Marau.

In those last few hectic days at Marau, John probably had no time to think more about his premonition of a war disaster in the Solomons. A year later, he and his two companions died at the hands of the Japanese.
Chapter 4

War Comes to Marau

1942

It was Friday 23 January 1942.

Brothers James, Ephrem and Ervan were worried as they walked briskly along the well-worn track to Paruru Plantation, about five kilometers to the south-east of their mission. Pararu was a well-organized commercial plantation where the Brothers were able to procure some basic stores, purchase small items for their gardens, and even buy stock at times. It was also a convenient point for hearing news of the outside world, as there was a radio there. The previous evening the Brothers had received a message from the plantation manager: the war threat was imminent, Japanese planes had been sighted, the Brothers were asked to come the following day for a meeting to discuss the situation.

As the Brothers drew closer to the plantation they saw a young man running towards them along the track. “The boss wants you to come quickly. There is terrible news. The Japanese bombed Tulagi last night!” The tension at the meeting of the European residents of Marau Sound was evident. After a long discussion, they decided that the best thing would be for them to evacuate if Japanese Forces occupied the area. The Brothers believed that a Japanese invasion of their mission was about to take place.

Over the following week the Brothers made hurried preparations to protect their school and to evacuate. James was afraid that the Japanese forces would seize his Annals. He did not want to reveal the plans they were making, or his obvious sympathy for the Allied cause. The entries over the following days show his apprehension, while giving no information about what they were doing during those anxious times:

January 24th: Preparations. Rest Censored. [James wrote the words “Rest Censored” in the Annals, because he did not want to give details about the
preparations they were doing – presumably hiding their valuable items in case of a Japanese raid.]  
January 25th: Boys told to be ready to return to school when they hear the conch shell blow. [This was to be the signal, warning of danger.]  

In fact, there was no immediate invasion. However, there were rumours that missionaries and civilian expatriates were to be evacuated from the island. The rumours were true, but the evacuation did not happen until ten months later.

**Fierce Fighting on Guadalcanal**

It was to be a difficult and tragic year for the people of the Solomons and for the Church there. The Marists decided not to flee from the war. Bishop Aubin, influenced by the Marist tradition of not running away from difficult situations, and hoping the Japanese would not interfere with missionaries, asked his Priests, Brothers and Sisters to stay on. Later that year the American General ordered a general missionary evacuation. In May 1942 the Japanese occupied Tulagi with a large force. The resident British Commissioner had relocated his Headquarters to Malaita Island after the bombing in January. The Japanese made their first visit to Bishop Aubin's headquarters at Visale in July 1942, soon after landing on the island. A month later the Americans staged a successful landing, and, amid some fierce fighting, secured the partly-built Japanese airfield. US commanders renamed it Henderson Airfield, after an American airman killed in the Battle of Midway. Ferocious fighting occurred over the following months, until the Japanese finally withdrew from Guadalcanal in February 1943.

In eight months of war, 20,000 Japanese and 7,000 Americans had been killed. At the end of August 1942, two priests, Fathers Engberink, SM, and Duhamel, SM, and two French Marist Missionary Sisters, Sylvia and Odilia, were captured and killed by Japanese near Ruavatu. Visale mission station was bombed in early September, forcing Bishop Aubin to move to Tangarare. Soon after, the American commander, General Vandergrift, ordered the evacuation of all missionaries. Reluctantly, he gave permission for Bishop Aubin and six Priests to stay on the island.
Between October and December 1942, ten Priests, five SM Brothers and nineteen Sisters, as well as our three FMS Brothers, were evacuated. There are a thousand fascinating Guadalcanal war stories.

Meanwhile, back on Marau Sound ...

**The Brothers Rescue American Airmen**

After the tense January meeting at Paruru Plantation, life settled down somewhat and James wrote more freely in his Annals, until early May 1942, when he fell silent again with a guarded entry, “Tulagi occupied by Japanese. Much doing around here.” As he did several times, he left a big space for writing the story at a safer time. He never got around to filling those blanks.

The invasion of Japanese ground troops caused anxious excitement at Marau, which was intensified a few days later when it was rumoured that an American plane was forced down nearby due to lack of fuel. The story was confirmed when a runner from Avuavu arrived on 10 May with a letter from Father Boudard SM. Boudard gave some details of the forced landing on the beach at Balo, which is about thirty kilometers west of Marau. The two Americans, safe and with Boudard, wanted to re-join their troops and asked for help to get back to Aola, a Government station on the north coast. Boudard, knowing that the Brothers had a reliable boat at Marau, the *Ramada*, asked if they could transport the airmen.

Never slow to accept a challenge, even if it involved great risk, and keen to do his patriotic duty in supporting the war campaign, James didn't hesitate. He set out at once for Avuavu, arriving just on dusk. Accompanied by the two grateful Americans, James began the return trip to Marau at midnight, travelling in heavy seas, to arrive safely in bright daylight at 8am. On arrival, they spotted two Japanese planes overhead, routine patrols, unrelated to the rescue of the airmen.

Safe at Marau, the Americans suggested that the aircraft radio could easily be salvaged and could be useful to the Brothers. Though the sea was rough and the journey dangerous, Ephrem sailed the *Ramada* back
to Balo that night, retrieved the radio and returned safely to Marau early the following morning. Over the following days, attempts to salvage more parts from the abandoned plane were defeated by the big seas and the fear of detection by the Japanese. They had to be content with the radio.

On the night of 12 May, James took the airmen in the Ramada along the coast to Aola, the Government station, a long journey of about seventy kilometres, and returned to Marau the following night. About that time a small contingent of Australian soldiers visited Marau on a reconnaissance mission and, with the Brothers' permission, hid a small cache of ammunition in their garden.

**Brothers Imprisoned by Japanese**

Some months later, in early August 1942, during morning Mass, two Japanese ships arrived in the Bay. The missionaries knew that the long-expected Japanese landing at Marau was about to happen, however no attempt was made to escape from the area. Their worst fears materialized about 10am, when a landing party arrived. The Japanese commander told the Brothers, through an interpreter, that they were now under
Japanese control and were not to leave the station. After a thorough search, several small firearms, food and other small items were confiscated, but the Australian ammunition and the aircraft radio were not discovered.

The Japanese camped at nearby Paruru Plantation, which had been abandoned several months previously. That night, in a huge storm, the two Japanese craft were blown onto a reef in the bay. Two days later, on 7 August, James recorded in his annals: “A big distraction at office time, 12.45.” The Brothers left their prayers to watch numerous American bombers overhead. One of the bombers broke formation and flew towards the stricken Japanese boats in the bay. Two bombs were released. There was a huge explosion as both ships were destroyed in full view of the Brothers.

The Brothers' fear of some form of retaliation for the Japanese loss was well founded. At dawn the following day, Saturday 8 August, a party of soldiers rushed at the Brothers who were at prayer on their verandah, and tied them up in the open, together with the two Priests from their house nearby. Through the interpreter they learned that they were to be killed as suspects for alerting the Americans to the presence of Japanese ships in their bay. “Where is your radio?” demanded the commander. “We have no radio,” they replied.

Another thorough search failed to find the aircraft radio, which had been well hidden. The missionaries believed their end had come. They were uncertain whether the rifles of the nearby soldiers or the sword of the commander himself would be the instrument of death. The threats continued for some time, as the commander tried in vain to extract information from the Brothers and Priests.

At that moment several allied planes flew low over the mission, heading west. It was enough to save the day. The commander barked orders; the prisoners were untied, dragged inside their house and tied up again. For seven hours, numerous allied aircraft flew overhead. Unknown to all involved in the drama inside the Brothers’ house, a bigger drama was occurring at that same time, around Lunga Point, one hundred kilometers
to the west, where a massive landing of 10,000 American troops was under way. It was this coincidence which saved the Brothers’ lives.

Exchange of War-time Notes. Both requests were granted. Final sentences in James’ letter read: There are sweet potatoes and cattle at Paruru. Perhaps with your permission some of our school could shoot some.

The Japanese, though clearly unnerved by the Allied air activity, continued their threats and search for the offending radio all that day. Finally, the soldiers demanded a meal, and Ephrem was untied to prepare it. Ephrem organized boys to collect potatoes from the garden, at the same time instructing one of the boys to get rid of the radio, which was hidden in the school building. The student sensibly disposed of it in the nearby river.

After the meal, which the Brothers and Priests were permitted to share, the soldiers instructed the missionaries to stay near the buildings and
said that a boat would come to collect them soon. No lights were permitted at night, and the missionaries were instructed to hide whenever planes flew over. This briefing concluded, the Japanese saluted the Brothers and Priests and marched off, laden with most of the Brothers' possessions.

“Prisoners on our own station!” James lamented. For the next month, life continued in constant fear of another visit from the soldiers and with severe restrictions on the Brothers' movement. Several times the Brothers sent boys to the Japanese camp to ask permission to go fishing. The requests were at first refused, but later granted. On 30 August, the Japanese camp was found to be deserted. The Japanese never returned and the Priests, Brothers and boys rejoiced at the end of their captivity.

Evacuation

Shortly afterwards it became clear that missionaries were to be evacuated, but no one knew when or how. By now the mission boats had been commandeered by the Government, and the school had more or less ceased operation, though quite a few boys were still with the Brothers, unable to travel.

During the last eventful months at the station the Brothers were involved in helping several other American airmen who came to grief in the waters near Marau.

On 30 November 30 1942, Bishop Aubin wrote a farewell message to the Brothers.

Dear Brothers,
Before you leave the Islands, I wish to express to you my sincere gratitude for the good work you have done at Marau. God knows it and will give your reward.
I feel quite sad to see you leaving in such an emergency, but it is safer to do it; and I hope, dear Brothers, that it is only for a time and that you will come back and resume your work in our mission.
God bless you, dear Brothers. I ask our Blessed Mother to protect you during your journey. Pray for me and those of my missionaries who are staying with me.
On 24 November a Government boat arrived. An officer informed the Brothers that the evacuation would occur within days, and that they should be ready. Four days later the boat returned to take them to Aola. James records:

It was a sad breaking-up of our home. Some things were put on the boat and preparations made. The prospects of a sea trip were not bright with the Japanese so active and persistent. Saying goodbye to our boys was hard. We promised to come back when things got better. But when?

At Aola they met up with the other missionaries who would be evacuated with them. On 2 December lights were seen flashing from a ship at sea, and later they were awakened to be told the evacuation would occur early the following morning. There was no more sleep that night as they made their final preparations for departure, transferring to the troop ship *USS Hunter Liggett* in the early hours of the morning. Because Solomon Islands’ waters were still dangerous, the ship, which was evacuating many missionaries from Solomon Islands, spent several days in the vicinity of Tulagi awaiting clearance before setting sail for New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) on 5 December. During the voyage there were several alarms, at the sound of which the missionaries were ordered below. James reported seeing, on one occasion, an apparently successful depth charge attack on a submarine, as oil and debris surfaced after the blast.

On arrival at New Hebrides, James commented on the large number of ships, possibly eighty, in the port. After transferring to the smaller troop carrier, *USS Kenmore*, the Brothers travelled to Noumea, which was also a hive of naval activity. There they spent an evening with twelve French Brothers who welcomed them warmly. By 13 December they were sailing southwards, uncertain of their destination until after they had sailed, due to military security. They found they were heading for Auckland, New Zealand, where they arrived on 15 December. Before arrival, the three Brothers shaved their bushy beards, untouched since the Japanese soldiers stole their razors in August.
The Brothers stayed in New Zealand for fourteen weeks, trying to secure a passage back to Australia, which, in wartime, was not easy. The Assistant General, Brother Clement Murray, a former Australian Provincial, happened to be in Auckland at that time. It is said that he was surprised to see the three Brothers and did not give them a warm reception. However, the New Zealand Brothers made their prolonged stay as pleasant as possible, under the circumstances. For most of the time they lived at the Juniorate at Tuakau, about fifty kilometres south of Auckland. Eventually they secured a passage from Wellington to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 28 March 1943, and Mittagong on 1 April, where a great welcome awaited them.

In September of that year James wrote to Father Courtais SM at Avuavu mission station, inquiring about the state of the Brothers' house and school. The reply, written on 11 November, told them that the bush
materials buildings were beginning to deteriorate, the animals were in
good condition, the furnishings were being used in the mission, and the
cache of valuables buried by James was still safe. Courtais concluded,
“I wish you success in your work, and a prompt return to Marau.”

The Marist Brothers did return to Marau, but not until the year 2000,
fifty-eight years later. Coincidentally, the second opening at Marau
was also short-lived and terminated by conflict, the ethnic tension of
1998-2002

Three years later, in 1946, the Brothers returned to the Solomons, where
they opened a school at Tenaru. James, however, was not re-appointed
to the Solomons. He began working at formation centres in 1946, first
in Victoria, then at Mittagong, New South Wales. Following a long
period of teaching in Australian schools, he returned to Mittagong in
his later years, where he lived for about twenty-five years. Many
Australian Brothers knew him there during their formation years. Often,
he entertained the young juniors with stories of his pioneering days in
the Solomons. Brother James Thrift died at St. Joseph’s College, Hunters
Hill, Australia in 1983.
The American, Thomas Wade SM, was the first priest in Bougainville who spoke English as his first language. Later he became its first Bishop. When he arrived in 1924, his first appointment was to a newly opened catechist school at Buronotui on Buka Island. The fact that he was an English speaker was of benefit to the mission, which was sorely short of English teachers. These early school experiences no doubt convinced the future Bishop of the importance of education in promoting the faith. It was Bishop Wade, who, in 1940 and 1941, asked for Australian Marist Brothers to open a school in his Vicariate. The new Australian Provincial, Brother Arcadius, responded positively, and, in spite of the looming Pacific war, committed three Brothers for the North Solomons.

The School at Chabai

Brothers Augustine and Donatus reached Chabai at the northern end of Bougainville Island in August 1941, while Brother John, needing to finalise matters at Marau, arrived two months later, on 14 October 1941. On arrival, Augustine and Donatus were greeted by the founder of the School, Dr Hennessy, a remarkable American priest who had established the school five years previously. Chabai was a catechetical boarding school, with a curriculum of basic English and Mathematics, religion and practical subjects. It was well organized, with a good balance of lessons, free time, and manual work in the school’s extensive food gardens. The school had an enrolment of about 100; it was well regarded and the young men were happy there.
Among the Chabai students was Leo Lising, a man from Siwai in southwest Bougainville. Leo is the brother of Bernard Kangku, who featured in the introduction of this book. In 1977 he wrote memoirs of his experiences of the war, which give a fascinating insight into the effects of the war on the ordinary people of the island. In his narrative the events of the last days at the school at Chabai unfold:

In 1941 three Marist Brothers arrived in Chabai. When they arrived, Father Hennessy went to Lemamanu on small Buka to look after the mission there. When he went to Lemamanu, the Second World War began on the island.

The Japanese took Hennessy from Lemamanu and took him to Kessa. Some Buka people saw him at Kessa, and the Japanese told them, “Tomorrow this priest is going home.”

The Japanese have a custom that, when they are going to kill someone they say, “Tomorrow this man is going to his home.” [Another source says that Hennessy died on the Japanese ship *Montevideo Maru* when an American submarine sank it.]
In 1941 the three Marist Brothers arrived. Their names were John, Donatus and Augustine. It was the first time the Brothers had opened a school on Bougainville. Previously, the Marist Missionaries (priests) had provided schools for the people of Bougainville, Buka, Nissan and Cartarets.

After Mass, our breakfast would be bananas and pawpaw from our garden. School lessons were from 8am to 10am, then a half-hour break, followed by work in our garden. We grew sweet potato, beans, corn, peanuts, tapioca, and taro. We were really happy with the Brothers, the schooling and the work they gave us. At lunchtime we would eat corn, beans, taro, peanuts or rice. We grew plenty of food in our garden. We were never hungry. We had many kinds of food crops in our garden.

On Saturdays we used to work only until 10am. At 12 o'clock, it was rest time and smoke time. In the afternoons we would work our own private gardens, where we grew all different kinds of food. Then, on the weekends, we would go to our private gardens to cook and eat.

We didn't have a lot of meat at school. But in our free time we used to hunt possum in the bush near Chabai, or go fishing in the sea. So, we were really happy in those days when we were at Chabai.

In the month of March 1942, the Japanese came to Bougainville and Buka. We were afraid when the Japanese planes used to fly over Chabai and Soraken. We used to hide from the planes when they flew over. When we heard the noise of the planes coming, we would dive for cover.

Early one Sunday morning, planes came and dropped bombs at Soraken and on Sohano Island. There was a small group of Australian soldiers on Sohano Island, about thirty.

For three days the Japanese visited Chabai. On Monday of Holy Week we went to hide in the bush with the three Brothers. We made our house in the bush with wild banana leaves. We also took the Blessed Eucharist with us into the bush and hid it in our bush house.

In the bush we had a big Mass to honour Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. We hid in the bush around Chabai and climbed trees to look out for the Japanese.

One day the Japanese came to Chabai. They looked around the house and our classroom, but they couldn't find anyone. So they went back to Sohano Island on their boat. On Easter Sunday we had a big Mass in our bush hideout.

The following day Bishop Wade came to see us at our place in the bush. He told us that we should not hide from the Japanese and that we should go back to the school. So we took the advice of the Bishop and moved back to the school.
The Bishop said, “You can't hide. Don't do that. All the students should go back to the school.”

Reluctantly, we went back to our school at Chabai, where our routine was Mass in the morning, then breakfast. In the afternoon, we would all go to our gardens to get food.

One day I heard the noise of a boat coming. I went down to the road which goes to the wharf. I saw Japanese standing on the beach near the wharf. I went to the house and I told the Brothers that the Japanese were at our wharf and were already coming up towards the school. The three Brothers, John, Donatus and Augustine were prepared for this visit from the Japanese. They had put all the Mass things and the large crucifix in a safe place.

When the Japanese were coming up to the school, I ran ahead to tell the Brothers they were coming. John had told me, “If the Japanese ask you anything, tell them that the Brothers are here.”

Soon the Japanese came up to the Brothers' house and called out, “Is anyone here?”
“Yes, we're here,” replied the Brothers.
“Who are you?” asked the Japanese.
“We are the Brothers.”
Now the Japanese asked them, “What are you doing here?”
“We are running a school.”
One Japanese asked, “What kind of a school is this?”
“It's a Catholic school.”
“And where are all your students?”
“They are in the garden,” the Brothers replied.
“Tell them all to come here,” one Japanese said.

The Brothers' cook rang the bell and all the boys came running up to the school. We stood in straight lines, as we did for the school line-up.

The Japanese commander addressed us:
“Now today we Japanese have come to your island to fight against the Australians and the Americans. We are going to have a big war here on your island. We don't want you students to stay here at the school. Therefore, today, you must leave this place. It is not good if you stay here, and there is a big fight, and many of you are killed. Go back to your parents today. Tomorrow, we are going to come back, and if we see any of you here, we will kill you.”

When they had finished speaking to us, they wrote a warning notice, stuck it on the door of our house and then left.

When the Japanese had gone, John spoke to us:
“We will be very sorry to see you go, but you must go. You know there is going to be a terrible war, there will be a lot of damage, and many people will die. Those of you who live nearby, go home now, this afternoon. And those who live far away, you will have to leave early tomorrow morning, before the sun comes up.

“You must not worry about us Brothers. We are going to stay here, and God will take care of us. You will help us with your prayers for us.”

When Brother had finished speaking to us, we all shook hands with each other and with the Brothers. When we had shaken hands, we slept. Early the next morning, at 5 o'clock, we left Chabai. That was the last time we spoke to the Brothers. The next morning, we got up early and just left. We left the Brothers there at Chabai.

(Leo Lising, 1977)

The Fate of the Three Brothers

That visit to the school by the Japanese took place in May 1942. After the students left, only the Brothers remained. They were anxious times. The Brothers had been at Chabai only a few months, and their school had been forcibly closed, and their very lives were in danger. The Japanese, who suspected the Brothers were spies, made repeated visits to their school at Chabai, and required them to report regularly to the Japanese headquarters on Sohano Island, in Buka Passage, about twelve kilometres to the north. Normally, some local people, perhaps the Brothers' former students, accompanied them on these trips; otherwise, the Brothers were confined to their school at Chabai. The Japanese visits to Chabai were occasions for extensive looting of the school property.

On 14 August 1942, the Japanese escorted the Brothers to their headquarters at Sohano, where they were imprisoned. Some people from Tarlena, a nearby mission station, observed the Brothers and their captors on the Japanese barge as it sailed north to Sohano. Later, Mr. Lawrie Chan, a good friend and ex-student of the Brothers, paddling by on his canoe, saw the Brothers under guard on Sohano Island. He reported later that a Japanese Officer had told him the Brothers were “going home to Australia”.

(Leo Lising, 1977)
The most likely scenario is that the Brothers were brought to Sohano to be interrogated by the Japanese. Of course, the Brothers had no information to provide, as they had just arrived on the island. At some point the Japanese commander decided that the Brothers were of no further use to his cause and ordered their execution. They were beheaded by Japanese war sword, and their bodies burned on Sohano Island. (The Japanese considered the sword to be an honourable means of execution for respected opponents. It is perhaps an indication that the Japanese admired the courage of the Brothers.) This happened in October or November of 1942.

**Hunting for the Facts**

Our knowledge of these tragic events is limited and relies largely on information from Lawrie Chan and Leo Lising. Their stories differ in
minor details. For a number of years the Brothers' Superiors in Sydney tried in vain to clarify the facts about what happened to the three Brothers.

The date, place and circumstances of their death have never been unambiguously established. We hoped that an answer might be provided when Japanese authorities returned in some numbers to Bougainville, years after the war, to collect the remains of their fallen. They often had precise military records showing the location of their own soldiers' graves. Our requests to Japanese authorities to search their records for information on the fate of the Brothers have proved fruitless. Knowledge of the Brothers' final end apparently died with the Japanese soldiers who killed them. No records have ever been found.

Early attempts to find information about our Brothers were hampered by wartime communication problems. It was six months after the Brothers died before the Australian Provincial, Brother Andrew, heard
of their capture. Even then, he was mistakenly informed that they had been taken to Rabaul and were being held at the Japanese Headquarters there. At war's end in 1945, when the Japanese surrendered at Rabaul and released their prisoners of war, thirteen missionaries were among them, but our Brothers were not found. Yet, some faint hope persisted that they would be found alive. It was only in June 1946 that the Provincial decided to arrange a Requiem Mass for the Brothers. Finally, in July 1947, the Australian Government wrote to the Provincial informing him “Brothers John, Augustine and Donatus were taken from Bougainville on a Japanese cruiser on 19 August 1942 and they met their death on 20 August or thereabouts”. That information was probably not correct, as we now believe the Brothers died later that year on Sohano Island in Buka passage, not far from their school. Lawrie Chan, the last person who reported seeing the Brothers alive, believes they were captives on Sohano for “perhaps two or three months” before they died. Thus, the deaths occurred in October or November of 1942. Death certificates were finally issued in 1947, which provided some closure to the affair. The Brothers observe 20 August as the memorial date of the Brothers' deaths.

The sequence of events described here is largely dependent on the contents of a letter sent by Lawrie Chan to Brother James Thrift in 1946. Mr. Chan's conclusions were supported by another contact in 1980 with an Australian who had been a soldier in the Bougainville Campaign in the closing stages of the war in 1944 and 1945. Bougainvillean, to whom he had spoken at that time, confirmed that Japanese soldiers beheaded the three Brothers.

**Another Disaster?**

We have none of John's writings since those final entries in the Marau Annals a year before he died. When did he realize that his death was imminent? We will never know. Perhaps it was back at Marau where he wrote with much anxiety about developing events; perhaps it was on the Japanese barge, as he made his final sea journey into the beautiful Buka Passage. His two companions barely had time to adjust to a new environment when their mission service was ended tragically and prematurely.
Once again, a Marist Brothers' endeavour in Western Melanesia met a sudden and tragic end. Chabai was added to the list of earlier apparent failures – San Cristobal, Woodlark Island, Rooke Island and Marau. But unless a seed dies, it will not come to life. So, six years later, the Marist Brothers returned to Bougainville to set down roots once again.

Meanwhile, the three Brothers in Guadalcanal, some seven hundred kilometers south west of Bougainville, were quite unaware of these tragic events. When John, Augustine and Donatus were killed towards the end of 1942, James, Ephrem and Ervan were still in Marau awaiting evacuation. Four years later, two of those three would be returning to Guadalcanal to re-open a school, not at Marau, but at Tenaru, near the new post-war capital Honiara.
Chapter 6

Early Days at Tenaru

1946 – 1948

After the war ended Bishop Aubin wasted no time in asking for the return of the Marist Brothers to continue the work of the Catechist school, which had begun at Marau. Brother Ephrem Stevens and Brother Ervan McDonough were selected to form the new community. Travel in the region was still restricted, so the Brothers had time to make preparations for their return.

The Return of the Brothers to the Solomons

1946 was a busy year. Ephrem writes, “After three months of feverish preparation ten tons of cargo of all descriptions were collected and packed at Bondi Junction in Sydney, ready for transport to the Solomons.” On 19 March Ephrem and Ervan flew to Auckland, New Zealand by flying boat and two weeks later sailed for Suva, Fiji, where they stayed for eleven days, finally arriving at Guadalcanal on 25 April. There they were quarantined for a week owing to a measles outbreak, and they were forced to “spend a dreary and hot week on board.” Finally they disembarked near Point Cruz (soon to become the new capital, Honiara). They were warmly greeted by Bishop Aubin, who had set up his headquarters in a row of tents along the beach, Visale having been reduced to rubble by American bombs. With the Bishop, they decided that it would be better to re-locate the school closer to Honiara, which would be a more central location for students from the different missions, and where more good land suitable for gardens would be available.

The war had left Guadalcanal a different place. There was battle debris everywhere - abandoned tanks, crashed aircraft, wrecked ships. Worse than the war hardware were the bombed settlements and mission stations, and the trauma and loss of those who had been part of the terrible conflict. On 11 May 1946 Ephrem and Ervan were once again awed by the beauty, the silence and the stillness of Marau Sound as the mission launch Beato
cruised slowly towards the familiar wharf. It was dusk, the same time as Ephrem's first arrival, eight years previously.

They spent the night in the priest's house. It rained heavily most of the evening. The next day they inspected the ruins of their school. The two Brothers had mixed emotions: heartbroken to see the collapsed buildings and the poor state of their few surviving cattle and horses, contemplating what might have been, yet anticipating a new beginning at Tenaru. They paused thoughtfully at the still-standing posts where the Japanese had tied them that terrible August day in 1942. They retrieved a few boxes of tools and an outboard motor, and returned to Honiara the following day.

There was much to do. The Brothers inspected several sites for the new school, finally settling on the Lever Brothers' plantation land at Tenaru. During the war the Americans occupied part of this land and had built a hospital there. Ephrem wrote:

> Everything we wanted was on this property: a plentiful supply of clean drinking water from the Tenaru River at our back door, ample farmland with rich soil, good access roads and drainage. On the army hospital site were rows and rows of buildings, a ready-built school, far superior to the leaf shed without flooring that we had at Marau. It was twelve miles from the new capital and two miles from the open sea.

The name Tenaru derives from the Aru trees (large pines) which were a feature of property at the time, apparently ten trees originally. For many years the annual school magazine was titled *Whispering Aru*, a reference to the rustling sound of the big trees in a gentle breeze.

**Ephrem's Printing Press**

Negotiations for the purchase of this land began on 20 May, but it would be five more months before the sale was finalized and the land could be occupied. During that time, Ephrem began work on writing and preparing reading texts for the new school. It was a huge project. Ephrem wrote and printed seven different reading books, 200 copies of each.

Brother Godfrey Boshell explains:
Ephrem had taken over a little printing press, a hand driven one. He got out a dictionary, using the Gari language, which was quite common among the Catholic population. The Bishop used to correspond with the people in Gari through the Solomons. Then he got out booklets, four or five readers. The first reader, would be a booklet containing, we’ll say, 100 English words, and all the stories would be made up of words using the dictionary that had at least 100 words in it. The boys cut the printing blocks out of masonite. We had a couple of lads who were very clever at making the printing blocks. They would cut it out very finely and they were delighted to see their work reproduced in book form. Ephrem had little photos, different little drawings of things he was explaining. He went from 100 words up to about 1000 words in these 5 or 6 booklets which were wonderfully put together. I’m sorry that none of those exist now. On a later visit to Tenaru I searched for those books to reclaim some of them but nobody knew anything about them.

**Ervan at Langalanga Lagoon**

Ervan, meanwhile, went to live at Buloabu Island in Langalanga Lagoon, Malaita Island, for three months. He had been asked by Father Dan Stuyvenberg SM (who would become Bishop Aubin's successor in 1958) to assist a Marau ex-student, Filipo Kakasi, who opened a school there during the war years. Ervan was delighted to meet his former student and proud to work alongside him in what became a successful school. The school began with forty-eight boys. Communication was in the Gari language. Ephrem was the only expatriate on Buloabu at the time, so, by necessity, he became fluent in Gari during his stay. When Ervan had to return to begin work at Tenaru, there was much sadness. He brought nine of the Buloabu boys back to Tenaru with him. It is said that the Superiors in Sydney were not informed of Ervan's work at Langalanga. Living “outside of community” and opening a school without the Provincial's knowledge were not “the done thing” in 1946. There were a few advantages in being out of communication with headquarters!

Buloabu was Marist work at its best, supporting a courageous local initiative to bring education to those who had none. Filipo Kakasi's and Ervan's work was remembered and celebrated in 1991 with the blessing and opening of the Marcellin Champagnat Church on the island. A plaque inside the Church reads:
This new Church unites in a special way the people of the Langalanga Lagoon, the Marist Brothers and St. Joseph's Tenaru. It was built by the people of Buloabu with some assistance from the Marist Brothers and their friends in Australia and replaces the old one destroyed by cyclone Namu in 1986.

It was in 1945 that this island was chosen as the site for a new school by Philip Kakasi, who was appointed its first headmaster. Uninhabited and swampy then, its clearing and raising above sea level was not an easy task for Philip and his first students. When it was completed, they built all the houses necessary for the new school to commence. Philip named it after the tallest tree in the middle of the island, the sacred Bulo Abu tree.

Brother Ervan FMS joined Philip in mid 1946 and they provided a high standard of modern education for the young men of central Malaita. As a result of the exams, nine of the students were chosen to go with Brother Ervan to Guadalcanal at the end of the year. There they again walked into history as the first students at the new St. Joseph's school, Tenaru, where Brother Ervan remained too, under the Headmaster, Brother Ephrem.

This plaque pays tribute to that early link with Tenaru through the hard pioneering work of Philip Kakasi and Brother Ervan. May it remind us of their great efforts and continue to inspire us who come after them.

Feast of Blessed Marcellin Champagnat, June 1991.
Filipo Kakasi, who was present at the opening of the Church, died in 2000. Another Buloabu student who transferred to Tenaru with Ephrem was John Fagani, who died in June 2003. John's son, Thomas Kaoni, was a teacher at St. Joseph's Tenaru in 2003.

**Tenaru begins**

8 October 1946 was a busy day, and a significant one, as the annals record:

> At midday, permission to buy the block of seven buildings at Tenaru was granted by the Resident Commissioner. Thank you, St. Joseph! At 2.30pm, the first load of cargo moved out to Tenaru. The truck and trailer were loaded to capacity. We unloaded, and Ephrem with six boys returned for a second load. Ervan stayed with three boys to clear the cargo and arrange bedding and supper. At 7.15pm, the truck returned. We unloaded, ate a well earned meal and slept our first night at Tenaru.

Since the hospital had been vacated, the jungle had already begun to invade the area, and vines were covering the buildings. In a few hectic days, buildings were cleared and raised from ground level onto concrete blocks (headstones from the nearby American cemetery, the bodies having been flown home), a water supply connected, food gardens begun, buildings modified to create classrooms.

Two weeks later, school lessons began, on 22 October 1946. The enrolment on opening day was eight, the boys who had come over from Buloabu.

The first timetable was:

- **7.30 – 8.15** Work
- **8.15 – 8.30** Swim
- **8.30 – 10.00** School (Ephrem)
- **10.30 – 12.00** School (Ervan)
- **2.00 – 5.00** Work
- Supper, Prayers, Bed
Later that month Ervan took three of the boys down to Marau to round up the cattle and horses which were to be the beginnings of the Tenaru herd. Having yarded the cattle, they returned on the mission launch. Some days later, it was the turn of Ephrem and the other five students to go to Marau to load the stock onto the ship and accompany them back to Tenaru. Unfortunately, the ship developed engine trouble and could not leave Marau. Ephrem and the boys waited, and waited, and waited. Four weeks later, they decided to walk back to Tenaru, a distance of about 150 kilometres. They were lucky to meet up with the Hambia, another mission boat, at Aola, after they had walked about half the distance. Later, after the boat engine had been repaired, Ervan went down to Marau again with some students and, finally, the stock arrived at Tenaru.

Some war surplus was available to the mission. Ervan McDonough reported that Father Wall SM, was the main person responsible for the distribution of the American surplus, and that he was not always as generous to the school as Ervan would have liked. “We had to battle for
our share.” The altar and lectern in the chapel were obtained from the American naval base chapel. “Fits our chapel admirably,” wrote Ephrem. Later, an army surplus truck and tractor were donated to the school. Godfrey Boshell recalls that in the early 1950s Tenaru students were sent out to collect the brass casings from spent ammunition which could be sold as scrap metal to get funds to help run the school. In churches across the Solomons and Bougainville, you can still find the casings from large shells being used as flower vases. A widely-used item was “Marsden Matting”, found in innumerable fences, stockyards and bridges even sixty years on, in many places around Guadalcanal and Bougainville.

By 1947 the school had grown to four classes, the Brothers taking two classes each. They were busy days for Brothers and boys. As well as taking regular classes, they had to produce all their own food from their extensive farm comprising gardens, animals and chickens.

Two Brothers for Bougainville

In October 1947 the Brothers received a cable informing them of the imminent arrival of Brothers Borgia and Simeon from Sydney. They planned a grand welcome for the arrival, prepared a bonfire tower and a built and decorated a platform on which the Bishop, Priests and Brothers would be seated for the official welcome. The flight was due at 5pm, so the generator was moved into position and lights erected for the occasion. The big day came, 28 October. Ephrem was at Henderson Airfield awaiting the flight, while Ervan and the boys waited expectantly at
Tenaru. Time passed, but no sign of the new arrivals. Then came heavy rain to further dampen proceedings. At 10.30 pm, still no sign of the visitors, and the rain continued to fall. The boys went to bed, disappointed. The Brothers finally arrived at midnight, in the middle of a tropical downpour. The rain lasted for several days, but at last the two new Brothers were given a true Solomons welcome on 1 November, with traditional dancing, bonfire and feast.

Brothers Borgia and Simeon had been appointed to the North Solomons, but worked with the Tenaru Brothers for eight months, leaving for Torokina on a war-time tank-landing craft on 14 June 1948. They took with them three pigs, fifty white leghorn chickens, peanuts and other seeds, as well as samples of books from the Tenaru printing press.

On 17 June 1948, the ex-US landing craft L.S.T. 553 arrived at Torokina, where the Brothers met four Marist Priests who were running the Mission Station and the school. As Simeon and Borgia stepped ashore at Torokina, they were following in the footsteps of the three who had died on Sohano Island, six years earlier. They were beginning a new chapter of Marist educational work on Bougainville Island, and, at the time of writing, 2003, their school, St. Joseph's, continues at Mabiri, quite different but with the same Marist spirit.

A gentle and effective teacher, Borgia was always held in great affection by his students and remained in their memories long after his relatively brief six-year appointment, while Simeon, a longer stayer, continued on in Bougainville until his death in 1962, fourteen years later. Always vigorous in his approach, Simeon was also a popular and respected teacher. His former pupils admired the fact that he chose to stay on their island for the rest of his life and that his remains lie in Bougainville soil. In the year 2000 Peter Chanel Pina, a chief in the Kieta area and an ex-student of Simeon, reflected on his former teacher: “Brother Simeon wanted to rest in Bougainville. He put his body on the land. He is here with us now.” Simeon's fascinating story comes later.

From Torokina, the Brothers soon moved to Kieta in Central Bougainville where the Marist Fathers had worked since 1901. This move marked the beginning of a significant era of the Brothers' work in Bougainville.
Chapter 7

The Birth of St. Joseph's, Rigu

Kieta, Bougainville 1948

**Marist Fathers at Kieta – a Brief History up to the Arrival of the Marist Brothers**

In 1898 the French Marist Fathers returned to Rua Sura in Solomon Islands to re-establish their mission there, after their departure fifty-one years earlier. In 1899, the German Marist Fathers opened a mission on Poporang Island in the Shortland Island Group, just a few kilometres off the southern coast of Bougainville, which had been under German control since 1884. Soon afterwards, the German administration encouraged the Marist Fathers to open a mission in Bougainville.

In 1900 the Marist Fathers purchased land at Kieta from the Pokpok Island people for the princely sum of ten axes, ten bush knives, twenty pieces of cloth, a box of beads and a small boat. Soon after, the people of Rigu village on the mainland disputed the ownership of land. “The Pokpoks had no right to sell it,” they said. Eventually, amid many such difficulties, the Marists established a thriving mission at Kieta, from which other stations were soon founded – Buin in 1903, Koromira and Torokina in 1908 and Buronotui on Buka Island in 1910. In 1905, the Marist Missionary Sisters (SMSM) established a convent at Kieta. In 1910, Father Joseph Forestiere, the priest in charge of the young Church in Bougainville, moved the mission headquarters from the Shortland Islands to Kieta, where it remained until after the war, when Bishop Wade transferred his headquarters to Tsiroge in North Bougainville. By 1924 there were twelve mission stations in Bougainville. The growth of the Church there prompted the Roman authorities to select Father Thomas Wade to be consecrated as Bougainville's first Bishop in 1930. There was a school at Kieta from early times, when Sarai, the Pokpok islander who sold the Kieta land to the Marists, requested a school for his people. The Kieta people's desire for literacy and education, always
strong, was further satisfied by the arrival of the Marist Brothers in 1948.

Rigu lagoon and Kieta harbour, Rigu School in centre, c. 1962

**Kieta and Rigu**

Kieta harbour is a beautiful place. The combination of islands, mountains, lagoon, streams, and a protected bay fringed with luxuriant tropical palms makes it one of the prettiest places on the coast of Bougainville. “Kieta” refers to the name of the District and the natural harbour formed by the nearby islands. After the development of the copper mine in the late 1960s, a small town which was established on the site of earlier German plantations was also called “Kieta”. Kieta town and nearby Happy Valley became expatriate settlements during the mining era. “Rigu” is the name of the immediate area where the school was located. The word is a colonial corruption of the Nasioi word “Dingu” which means “hole”. The local Nasioi people called the lagoon “Dingu” and this became the name of the small coastal hamlet situated on the edge of the lagoon, hidden behind mangrove forest. Later,
the Marist Brothers used either name, “Kieta” or “Rigu”, when referring to the school.

**Torokina – The Mission, Arrival and Departure of the Brothers**

The Marist Fathers arrived at Torokina in 1908. Soon afterwards, they established a school, and set up a printing press to serve the needs of the mission. Later, the Marist Missionary Sisters opened a leprosarium nearby. War surplus Quonset huts, with their characteristic curved roof, replaced many of the original mission buildings destroyed by bombing during the war. Brother Borgia described the Brothers' arrival at Torokina in the “Annals of Marist Brothers' School Kieta”:

17 June 1948: We anchored off Torokina Cape at 12.20 p.m. The Government patrol Officer came on board and met the ship's officers and the Brothers. At 1.30 p.m. Fathers O'Sullivan and Moore came on board to meet us and we went ashore with them, returning later with a small mission barge to land our cargo. We had our last meal on board ship and returned to shore after saying farewell to the Captain and the officers. We transferred our cargo onto the mission
truck and delivered it to the mission headquarters where we met Fathers Caffiaoux and Poncelet, with whom we dined. They were very pleased to see us, particularly Father Caffiaoux who had been conducting the school while awaiting our arrival. At 7.45pm the priests showed us to our quarters and after a short chat we were left to ourselves. We were not long seeking our beds but it was a poor night's sleep in the new surroundings.

Two days later the Brothers encountered a minor bureaucratic hitch. In moving from the British-controlled South Solomons to the Australian-controlled North Solomons, they had overlooked the necessary immigration requirements and did not have Entry Permit papers. They were illegal immigrants! Sudden deportation was averted by the speedy intervention of Brother Andrew in Australia, who contacted the Australian Government authorities.

A Wartime Quonset Hut

The Brothers had arrived on Thursday and by Monday they were in class. School proceeded smoothly with minor interruptions for wet weather. (“We were washed and blown out of the school by heavy rain. The boys went to the dormitory for warmth and to continue study.”) Already, however, there was talk that the Torokina school was to be re-located.

The establishment at Torokina did not last long. It turned out that Bishop Wade had already decided that the school should be moved to Rigu in the Kieta District on the opposite side of the island. The reason for this decision is not clear. It is known that, in 1948, Mt Bagana, an active volcano twenty-five kilometres to the east, was discharging more than
its usual amount of ash which Brother Simeon, who was an asthmatic, found distressing. Some sources say that concerns about the health of the boys and Brothers as a result of the ash fallout were the reason for relocation. This is unlikely, as it seems the Bishop had decided to move the school prior to the Brothers' arrival. Furthermore, in spite of the short-lived ash emissions in 1948, Torokina has never been considered an unhealthy location. The mission, under the leadership of Fathers
O'Sullivan, Caffiaoux, and Moore, continued on the Torokina site after the re-location of the school. In less than two months after the arrival of the Brothers, work had begun on dismantling the Torokina school and transporting buildings, including several Quonset huts, to the other side of the island with the assistance of a forty-tonne barge. The long period of Marist Brothers' presence in the Kieta District of central Bougainville was about to begin.

**Marist Brothers' Arrival at Kieta**

At about 6:30pm, 11 August 1948, Brothers Borgia and Simeon, with twenty-one boys and a cargo of building parts and materials, arrived by the mission barge in Kieta Harbour. The following day the Brothers decided on the best location for the school, and the barge was unloaded. Eight large tents were erected and became their temporary accommodation and storage space until better buildings were constructed. In fact, the boys and Brothers used these tents for another seven months before they were able to move into their newly-built accommodation.

The busy school site naturally aroused great interest among the local Kieta people. It was not long before Simeon, the builder, had co-opted many of the local men to cut posts for the new buildings, at the handsome rate of three shillings a day. Among the first helpers were a Kieta man, Baimbai, and his wife Kaki, from Dingu village on Rigu's picturesque lagoon. Baimbai later worked in the Brothers' house as a cook and was a dependable caretaker whenever the Brothers were absent. Kaki's family were the traditional landowners of the Rigu school site, so Baimbai and Kaki took a lifetime interest in the welfare of the Brothers and the school.

**A School Arises**

The early construction took several months. For the first six weeks there were no formal classes, as Borgia ferried goods from Torokina in the barge, while Simeon directed building operations. Simeon, the son of a tradesman in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, Australia, had learned many skills from his father. He was creative and practical,
designing and constructing buildings which were functional, suitable to the climate, and aesthetically pleasing. It was a remarkable achievement in Bougainville in the late 1940s, where little was available apart from local materials and war surpluses. At that time, and for decades after, visitors were impressed by the standard of facilities that Simeon built, assisted by Borgia, the students and other local helpers.

These were exciting times when the pioneering spirit was alive and well. The fact that the boys had no lessons but were fully engaged in clearing land, collecting posts, erecting buildings and developing gardens, no doubt contributed to this atmosphere of adventure. Nonetheless, the physical conditions were trying for all - no beds, no permanent cooking facilities, no washing facilities or toilets, not even a house!

The Kieta mission never had an adequate supply of running water even though it had been established at the turn of the century. Now, with a larger population of school students, that problem had to be addressed. It was Baimbai who came to the rescue by advising on the location of a suitable water supply. Brother Godfrey Boshell, who was at Rigu from 1952 to 1957, explains:

When Borgia looked for a fresh water supply at Rigu, he went up the hillside behind our school to Baimbai’s village. Baimbai showed Borgia a strong-flowing natural spring. Borgia got his permission to put in several 44 gallon drums, filled them with rocks, then river pebbles, then sand to set up a filter system. Then, with wartime piping, he constructed a pipeline down the hillside, across the bottom of the lagoon and on to our property. It was a great boon to us and the mission. Baimbai made sure that rubbish and rubble did not clog up the system. At a later date, I joined up this supply to a solar system which I made, and thus we had hot water for showers and washing.

On 15 October 1948, just two months after arrival, Borgia and his boys completed the pipeline, and for the first time in forty-six years there was running water in the mission buildings. For many years Baimbai continued his service of maintaining the water intake and keeping it clear of debris.
Later in 1971 when the school had grown considerably and the water needs were greater, it was Baimbai again who assisted in gaining access to reliable water. Brother Montfort Hickey, who was at Rigu from 1966 to 1972, writes:

In 1971 when we needed more water for Rigu it was Baimbai who talked to those who shared ownership of the stream and waterfall on the other side of the lagoon and brought them together to ratify the agreement. To help Baimbai and Kaki, we included in the plans a pipeline to their house and a tank.

The only known photograph of Baimbai and Kaki
Baimbai: Front row, fourth from left, partly obscured
Kaki: Back row, second from left

The photo was taken Christmas 1967, when Brother Colman (third from left, back row) brought some Brothers and helpers from Australia to build the Brothers' house.
Back Row: Brother Dunstan Cavanagh (Australia), Kaki, Brother Colman Carroll, Brother Finan Mahony, Brother Michael Kaminei, Brother Kevin O'Neill (USA), Brother Montfort Hickey (wearing hat), Henry Taul.
Front row, third from left: John Bika
Pictured also are the boys who assisted with the building (other names unknown).

Partly due to the influence of Baimbai and other sympathetic locals, the school was relatively untroubled by land disputes during its existence at Rigu from 1948 to 1992. However, when it comes to land, Bougainvilleans have a long memory. Traditional ownership of the former site of the school, overgrown by jungle, was still in dispute after the Bougainville Crisis. This was one of the reasons for the re-location of the school in 1999 to another more favourable site at Mabiri.
By the end of October 1948 some houses had begun to take shape. Simeon, however, became quite ill with asthma, and several times during the final months of 1948 he had to be evacuated to the medical aid post at nearby Tunuru for treatment and recuperation. He was out of action for one to two weeks each time. Meanwhile, Borgia “keeps all the wheels turning and the school going”. (Annals, 19 November 1948)

The Brothers and their students celebrated the first Christmas at Rigu with plenty of religious activities, including three Masses, evening prayers, benediction and rosary. The Christmas meal comprised turtle and garden food cooked in a mumu (hot stones). The last week of 1948 was a holiday week, during which the students and Brothers enjoyed a programme of sports, swimming competitions, bush outings and picnics.

Willingly accepting the deprivations of their isolated life, and faithful to their Founder’s spirit of hard work, the two Brothers laid the foundations of a flourishing school at Rigu in 1948. Meanwhile, at Tenaru in Solomon Islands, the Marist Brothers' missionary endeavour was being consolidated in similar fashion.
Chapter 8

Tenaru's Growing Years

1948 – 1958

After the departure of Brother Simeon and Brother Borgia for Bougainville in June 1948, two Marist SM coadjutor Brothers stayed at Tenaru for several months, assisting with the dismantling of the war buildings which were not required or were unsuitable for school use. These materials were stored and used for future projects for many years.

The following year, 1949, the Sydney Provincial, Brother Andrew Power, made the first of his many trips to Solomon Islands. He was active in promoting local vocations to the Marist Brothers, a story which is taken up in the following Chapter. Brother Ephrem and Brother Ervan no doubt took the opportunity to press the Provincial for more manpower, because shortly after the Provincial's departure Brother Colman Carroll joined the Tenaru staff.

New Arrivals

Colman arrived on M.V. Morinda on 7 September 1949, bringing with him “a big cargo, including two Shorthorn calves”. Colman stayed at Tenaru fourteen years, a period which was, in his own words, “busy and satisfying”. He was headmaster of Tenaru from 1958 to 1963. Later he worked at Sixteen Mile, near Port Moresby, at Rigu on Bougainville, and at Kiunga in Western province of PNG, making a total of thirty years in Solomon Islands and PNG.

Colman had been of great assistance in the preparations for the departure of the Brothers for the Solomons in 1946, having procured Ephrem's printing press, along with many other items. All his life a practical man and a skilled tradesman, Colman used his building skills extensively. In 2003, many of his buildings are still in use, at Tenaru, Sixteen Mile, Goroka and Kiunga. His pride and joy, the Brothers' house at Rigu, was
burned, along with the entire school, during the Bougainville Crisis in 1994. Even when he returned to Australia, he was able to attract support from his tradesmen friends, particularly in Lismore, where he worked for seventeen years after leaving Tenaru. He led a group of Lismore tradesmen and helpers to Rigu in December 1968, who, under his expert leadership, constructed the Brothers' house. With similar assistance from Australian friends, Colman's constructions arose in Marist institutions across PNG in subsequent years. Colman's contribution to Marist Missionary work in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea was invaluable.

![Colman returned to Tenaru to celebrate his Diamond Jubilee in 1995](image)

Brother Godfrey Boshell, Headmaster of Tenaru from 1953 to 1957, recalls Colman's contribution and the resourcefulness of the early Brothers:
I am still amazed at Colman's hard work and innovation in changing a rundown war hospital building into a first class boarding school. A weapons carrier was our main transport, a small bulldozer our means of clearing rubbish. Welders, generators, freezer units, power tools and hand tools were all “purchased” with a smile from the Americans who were cleaning up Henderson Airfield. Colman designed and built hot-air copra driers and introduced rice growing and sweet potato growing on a large scale. Nothing was beyond him.

On 5 January 1951 Brother Gervase Shekleton arrived on *M.V. Morinda*, to join Brothers Ephrem and Colman. Gervase stayed until the end of 1953 when Brother Francis Borgia McGinty replaced him.

Supplying food for the growing school population was a constant concern. With the help of an American bulldozer and many days of work by Brothers and students, a large area of land was cleared and rice and sweet potato planted. Brother Ervan recalls: “It was difficult and dangerous work as there was a mass of barbed wire entanglements, plus bombs and live shells. However, it was carried through and the gardens were successful and sufficient to supply the needs of the school.” (Letter to Sydney Provincial, March 1968).
Polio Epidemic

In 1951, there was an epidemic of polio which struck the school, affecting about sixteen boys. Polio is a contagious viral disease of the central nervous system which causes paralysis, often-permanent disabilities and sometimes death. By the end of the 20th century the disease had been largely controlled and outbreaks were rare, owing to the widespread use of new vaccines, but, in the Solomons in the 1950s no such vaccines were available, and the epidemic caused a major problem for the school and the entire island. Inter-island travel was banned in an attempt to prevent the spread of the disease. Ephrem rose to the challenge. The first cases were sent to the hospital, but Ephrem realized that equally good or better care could be provided at the school, where he set up an isolation area to protect uninfected students. Gervase Shekleton recalls the period:

Ephrem read what little literature about the disease there was available in that remote place. He designed wheelchairs made from steel Jeep seats and bicycle wheels, for those who couldn't walk, and then gave them therapy which enabled some to walk again. He encouraged those on crutches to practise up and down the pathways, often with a strip of bicycle tubing tied between knee and foot to prevent the foot dragging on the rough surfaces and causing ulcers. In time, some of his patients graduated from chair to crutches to walking sticks to independent mobility. Without the best of hospital care, many people in the Solomons and elsewhere died. Those who opted to go to their village, or were taken there by their families, died, because untrained locals couldn't care for them adequately. But Ephrem pushed them to their limits, and demonstrated that it was possible for them to get well enough to live, laugh and love.

Emergency at Hell's Point

After the Second World War, the American Military abandoned their stockpile of munitions at Hell's Point, which, unfortunately, was near the site at Tenaru, which the Brothers had chosen for their new school. There were many tonnes of ammunition of all kinds: naval shells, hand grenades, bombs, boxes of rifle shells and machine-gun shells. From the beginning of the school in 1948 until the present century, Hell's Point has been a source of danger for the students and teachers. One serious incident occurred on 19 June 1951.
The *Sydney Sun* newspaper reported that the explosions and fire occurred as an Australian Bomb-Disposal team was attempting to remove shells from the area; consequently a fire swept through the area near the school. Initially, the Brothers were more concerned about their ripening rice crop in the path of the fire than about the danger from explosions at Hell's Point. Unfortunately, a local man died and three others were injured. Gervase Shekleton recalls the incident:

A local man, although instructed by the ABD expert not to do so, picked up a harmless looking but highly unstable 20 mm round which exploded and killed him, quite close to the expert. Very upset, the expert drove down to the school and requested a blanket from Ephrem to cover the body.

The army raised an alarm in Honiara town, even preparing for an evacuation of the town should the situation worsen. Honiara is some eleven kilometres distant, while Tenaru school is only about five hundred metres from Hell's Point. The army blockaded the main road leading to the school and Hell's Point. The Brothers were unaware of the road closure and the alarm raised in Honiara. Ephrem recorded in the Annals: “There did not seem to be greater danger than before; in fact, the boys carried on their work without worry.” The following day the false rumour reached the school that Tenaru had been evacuated. On 21 June the Bomb Unit called at the school to inform the Brothers that the emergency was now over and the roads were open again. “But we had not been told they were closed!” Ephrem wrote in the Annals. It was not the last time there was a problem at Hell's Point.

The bomb-disposal experts continued their work and the worst of the stockpile was put on barges and dumped into the sea. On 22 October 1951, there was an actual evacuation of the school ordered by the Bomb Unit. Ephrem, however, was sceptical about its necessity. He wrote in the Annals: “The purpose of the evacuation was to give the BDU some fun exploding bombs which should have been thrown into the sea. We lost a half day's school.” When the Bomb Unit finally left, a lot of unexploded ordnance still remained, undiscovered, buried, covered by bush, or too small for the bomb experts to be concerned with. As recently as 1999 and 2000, the protagonists in the ethnic tension conflict armed themselves with World War Two ammunition from Hell's Point.
Paul Murphy, who was at Tenaru from 1972 to 1981, and from 1984 to 1990, reflects on Hell's Point:

An extraordinary thing about Tenaru was the bomb dump which was just down the road. It was called Hell's Point. There were tonnes of live ammunition, ranging from naval shells to hand grenades. It was scattered everywhere. It would blow up occasionally. Some of it was still on our property, and we'd unearth it. The priests, when building their house, unearthed a naval shell which you could hardly lift up in your two arms. Some of it was quite dangerous, leaking and ready to blow up at any time. There were times when I heard shrapnel go past my ear and another time we had shrapnel through the roof of the house. When we cleared land down the back for the cattle, it was a very strong rule of mine that, when the students would heap up stuff against the stumps to burn them out, no fires were to be lit till we lit them all together then cleared out. Invariably something went off and blew a huge hole in the ground. We didn't lose any kids' lives. Ploughing there, we'd often plough up hand grenades, then jump off the tractor and run for our lives. In the 70s there was still quite a lot of that. There are a lot of stories about Hell's Point.
Brother Godfrey Appointed as Headmaster

At the end of 1951, Ephrem completed his allotted six years as Director of the Tenaru community. However, he was re-appointed for the first six months because of limited shipping to Honiara from Australia. His replacement, Godfrey Boshell, unable to secure a passage to the Solomons until mid 1952, arrived at Honiara on 28 June. Ephrem had left earlier on 10 April, Holy Thursday. Some years later, he returned to work at Tarlena, on Bougainville Island.

Godfrey had an adventure on the voyage from Sydney to the Solomons. He describes the incident:

On the way over, M.V. Malaita, being a cargo ship, moored outside Lord Howe Island. There are no port facilities on these islands, so smaller boats are used to transfer the cargo from the big ship to shore. We completed that in the morning. The sea became rough, so we pulled out and anchored just within sight of Lord Howe Island. During lunchtime we heard a grating sound and a couple of knocks. The boat hit a reef, a plate was dislodged and water rushed in. The skipper briefed us and requested the male passengers to man a lifeboat, collect a load of sand from a nearby beach and bring it back so that they could pour concrete into the hull where the hole was. Anyhow, we did that. They had to fly a seaplane out, which landed alongside us, and then a diver replaced the missing plate. Fortunately the concrete held, so, with the emergency repair complete, we continued on our journey.

Godfrey continued the rice project pioneered by Ephrem. It was a successful venture, providing an alternative food-source for several years. The rice, together with ample supplies of local garden foods, ensured that the school continued to be self-supporting. Godfrey explains some of his more creative gardening efforts and the means used to raise money for the school in those days:

I developed a system of elevated gardens, using Marsden matting standing up on diesel drums, so the soil wouldn't get hot. I grew ordinary lettuce, beans and carrots. We didn't lack for food but what we did lack was money to buy things. A couple of times we just had to say, we didn't have the money, that's it. The Bishop sent out money from the Procure only every now and then, so it depended on our getting money from the sale of copra to have funds to run the school. There was nothing like a stipend coming from Australia. The Bishop paid a stipend which was not nearly enough to run a school. So we had to make
copra or collect brass [from spent World War Two bullet casings], which was selling for six pence a pound at the time. As an incentive, we used to pay the boys three pence a pound for the brass shell casings they collected. We sent out drums and drums of it to the scrap metal people. Anyway, that helped to run the place.

Until Godfrey's time the students selected for enrolment were older boys. Godfrey established an entrance test for selection of new students from the different missions. As a consequence, younger students were accepted into the school. This was educationally favourable, but the younger average age resulted in a less efficient work force to keep the school gardens running. In Godfrey's time, the Brothers introduced a certificate of Primary education which they awarded to the students when they graduated from Grade Six, an idea which was adopted throughout the Protectorate.

In December 1952, Godfrey and the Brothers sent off three young men who had decided to go to Australia to become Marists: Michael Diki, Isaac Meresiniihnua and Benedict Kinika. These joined John Tura, Malakia Sukuatu and Benedito Laumanasa, who had left for Australia in 1950 and 1951. Brother Edwin (Isaac Meresiniihnua) recalled that in the years he had attended St Joseph's as a student he worked closely with the Brothers in building the school and working the gardens. Through these close relationships, Isaac decided that he wanted to join the committed, hard-working men who were his teachers.

Near Disaster at Sea

In July 1953, the Assistant General from Rome, Brother Justinian, together with the Provincial, Brother Andrew, visited Tenaru. A highlight of the visit was a trip to Buma on Langalanga Lagoon, a voyage which almost ended in disaster. On board were the two visiting Brothers, Bishop Aubin, Godfrey, Gervase, and a number of local crew. Godfrey tells the story:

We couldn't get the mission boat, which was going around the mission stations on the islands, so we chartered a little boat called Summit, with its crew of about four. We set out about ten o'clock on a beautiful moonlight night, with the sea as calm as a lake. By midnight, a storm came up, one of the heaviest I
have ever seen. The little boat pitched from side to side, water came over the
deck and swamped the engine. In fact, it filled the lower deck with water and
the crew tried to pump it out. In the little cabin, there was room only for the
Bishop, Andrew and Justinian. Gervase and I were up on the deck. We tied
ourselves to the boat with ropes to prevent being washed overboard. The crew
panicked and gave up trying to pump out the water, as they were getting nowhere.
Water was rapidly filling the boat. Gervase and I got down there with them
with buckets and bailed out the water as best we could. The Bishop was about
to give us all the last rites and blessing. At first light, the storm abated a little.
I got down into the engine room, wiped all the electrical wires and the magneto,
and after about an hour's fooling about, we finally got the motor started. It all
ended safely, yet that was one of the most frightening trips I have ever made.

**Shark Tragedy**

Brother Daniel McEwen, who was at Kieta on Bougainville from 1973
to 1978, tells the story of shark hunting at Rigu on Bougainville:

Once a shark was silly enough to come into the beach. In Australia, when a
shark comes to the beach, everyone runs out of the water. At Rigu, it was the
opposite. If someone sang out, “Shark!” then 400 boys would run into the
water, with anything they could get hold of, garden forks, metal, anything.
They would club this poor shark to death, drag it out of the water, and make
soup of it

Regrettably, shark attacks occurred at Kieta at Tenaru. In March 1956,
one of the students, John Mary from Takwa village on Malaita Island,
was diving for fish near a war wreck at about 1.00 p.m. when he was
attacked, and his left leg was severed. He died soon after and was
buried the following day, amid much grieving from the school
community.

**Godfrey Hands Over a Thriving School**

Under Godfrey's leadership, the school grew in numbers from about
thirty to about one hundred students. The curriculum was developed
and formal examinations established. Additional facilities included an
assembly hall and a dining hall. Well-organised gardens ensured a
plentiful supply of food. Godfrey returned to Australia, where he became
headmaster of a Sydney school for six years, before returning to
Bougainville in 1965 and Tenaru in 1966-67. When Colman Carroll
took up the reins as headmaster in 1958, St. Joseph's High School Tenaru had come of age, and was one of the leading schools in the Solomons.
Chapter 9

The First Solomon Island Brothers

Brother Andrew Power, the Sydney Provincial, had a mission of his own. During his visitations to communities one of his priorities was to encourage vocations to the Marist Brothers. It is no surprise that he had decided to promote vocations from the Solomons and Bougainville, as well as from the Australian schools. He first visited Solomon Islands in 1949 and stayed for more than a month.

Andrew had an interesting stay at Tenaru, beginning with car problems on the journey from the airport. Some hours later, he arrived at the school at night, after alternative transport had been found. The students welcomed him with songs, and, later, “one and a half hours of dancing under electric light on the oval”. Andrew was able to visit different parts of the island during his stay. He saw the opening of a new Church at Ruavatu, forty kilometres east of Tenaru and was pleased to visit Tangarare on the weather coast, where the first Brothers had been introduced to the Gari language eleven years earlier. Impressed by the celebrations for St Joseph's feast day, Andrew wrote in his visitation notes: “Biggest festival of the year for St Joseph, the patron of the school. Two pigs, one thousand coconuts, manioc etc.” Andrew also witnessed the excitement of the arrival of the new mission ketch *Capricorn*, later re-named *Santa Anna*, from Australia. On board were four cattle from Mittagong, Australia, and “various boxes of goods” for Tenaru. There was the opportunity to meet many of the Marist Priests and to renew acquaintances with Bishop Aubin with whom Andrew held extensive discussions about the Brothers' work and conditions.

First Departures for Australia

Andrew interviewed many students who were prospective vocations for the Marist Brothers. Six months later, the first Solomon Islanders to begin the journey towards becoming Marist Brothers left for Australia.
The entry in the Tenaru Annals for 5 January 1950 reads:

The first two boys leave Tenaru for Australia to try their vocation as Marist Brothers. John Tura from Cape Marsh [Cape Marsh is an old name for the Russell Islands] and Malakia Sukuatu from Avuavu. They leave on Muliamia. Brother Ephrem and classes 3 and 4 go to bid them God Speed.

A month after they departed, the following entry was recorded:

News from Australia: Safe arrival and happy settling-in of our juniors.

The brief annals entries do not capture the momentous cultural upheaval experienced by these two boys in moving to Australia. The Brothers themselves, while thanking God for the blessing of two local vocations, were unaware of the cultural issues involved in sending the two boys into a western country. They believed the only important life tasks confronting the young men were, firstly, formation to Religious Life and, secondly, advancing their academic credentials. During the long journey to Sydney the two young men were excited by the experience of travel to a new and fascinating land and idealistically looked forward to their future life as Marist Brothers. However, the journey itself was quite trying for the young men. The Brothers had provided them with a bale of rice, some sweet potato and sleeping mats, to provide food and minimal comfort for the long sea voyage. The boys were required to travel in the crew's quarters.

John and Malakia did not return to Solomon Islands until 1958. During the eight years of formation in Australia (with no home holidays), they accepted unquestioningly the colonial cultural assumptions of the time, namely, that the western way of living was the only civilized way, and that development consisted in adopting a western lifestyle. There was no intended malice or slight – it was the thinking of the period, and the Australian Brothers did not anticipate the adjustment problems the Melanesian Brothers would experience on their return. Indeed, the two young men, and the Bougainvilleans and Solomon Islanders who joined them in later years were accepted and liked by the young Australian candidates, and it is fair to say that most, if not all of the Melanesian young men, enjoyed the experience of living and studying in Australia.
Years after the Brothers' return it became clear that the decision to send these young Melanesians to Australia for their formation, at such a young age and for an extended period was, in fact, unwise.

When the young Solomon Islanders arrived in Sydney in January 1950, the Provincial, Andrew, took the boys to St. Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, a dazzling journey through the huge city of Sydney. On arrival at the College, their first feeling was not so much wonder but shame. John Tura explains:

I felt ashamed because Malakia Sukuatu and myself were wearing short pants, singlets and sandshoes, while everybody at the College was wearing long pants, shirts, ties, coats and shoes. We both had difficulty in speaking the language, because our knowledge of English grammar was next to nothing. As well, we were unfamiliar with the Australian way of eating with knives and forks; normally at home we used only a spoon.

John and Malakia proceeded to the Juniorate at Mittagong, a high school intended for Marist aspirants. John, an intelligent student, succeeded in gaining his Grade Twelve Leaving Certificate at the end of 1954, by which time ten other young men from the North and South Solomons had joined the group.

School Days at Bowral

Brother William Molloy was the Master of Juniors at the Minor Juniorate at Bowral, where the young men transferred when it opened in 1952. The young Melanesians quickly became popular with the Australian boys, who were usually several years younger. Because of the age advantage and natural athletic prowess, they were admired and respected for their sporting ability. Joseph Gohan from Buka Island was a star hockey fullback; Benedito Laumanasa was a champion athlete, while Isaac Meresinihinua was a successful goal kicker in rugby league. He practised for hours kicking for goal from where the half way line met the touch line. His classmate, John Gilfoyle, observed one successful kick from that position.

The Bowral Juniors had a champion hockey team, and after defeating the Franciscan Novices team from nearby Robertson, they were invited
for a return match of rugby league. The Marist Juniors team comprised mostly small boys, except for Benedito Laumanasa and Isaac Meresinihinua. The Franciscans, however, were all older. The kick off resulted in a penalty for the Marists. The ball was handed to Isaac. All the Franciscans smiled, not expecting this ungainly Melanesian to able to score the goal from a difficult position. The smiles turned to dismay as Isaac's confident kick sailed between the posts. Marists leading 2-0. History records a 52-2 loss for the Bowral Juniors. There were no further football games against the Franciscans that year.

Isaac's independent nature showed itself at times. On one occasion, William decided that the Solomonese surnames were just too long and too difficult to be practical. Without warning, he decided to shorten the names when calling the class roll.

“Benedict Lauman!” he called. Benedito Laumanasa was taken aback, but realising William could only be referring to him, quickly answered, “Present Brother.” Isaac Meresinihinua was next on the alphabetical list.

“Isaac Meresini!” called the Master of Juniors. There was no answer.

“Isaac Meresini!” repeated William. Silence. Everyone in the class, including William, knew that Isaac was present. At twenty years of age, Isaac was a big-framed man who towered over the rest of the class. It was impossible to miss him.

“Isaac Meresini!” The tension in the room was electric as this battle of wits continued.

It was too much for William. After a long pause, he called “Isaac Meresinihinua!”

“Present Brother!” Isaac responded immediately and politely. William made no further attempts to modify the Solomonese names.

**Homecoming**

On 2 July 1956, four young Brothers from Solomon Islands were the first Solomon Islanders to make their profession as Marist Brothers at Mittagong, Australia. They were John Tura (Brother Raphael), Malakia Sukuatu (Brother Howard), Isaac Meresinihinua (Brother Edwin) and Benedito Laumanasa (Brother Alphonsus). Brother Joseph Luhwaku
from Siwai in Bougainville also made his first vows with the Solomon Islanders. He was the first of the Bougainvilleans to be professed as a Marist Brother.

Solomon Islanders First Profession Day, July 1956: Brothers Edwin Meresinihinua, Raphael Tura, Alphonsus Laumanasa, Howard Sukuatu

Later, two other Solomon Islanders made their vows in Australia. They were Michael Diki (Brother Chanel), who was professed in 1958, followed by Benedict Kinika (Brother Benedict) in 1960. (The Bougainvilleans were professed around the same time – Brother Bernard Kangku in 1957, Brother Michael Kaminei in 1959 and Brother John Paul Mauro in 1961.)

After studies in Sydney the six pioneering Solomon Island Brothers returned home to begin their ministries. Their long absence had changed them. While they returned as Religious, greatly respected by their people, each in his own way encountered re-adjustment problems. They had
lived outside their culture for many of their young adult years and had lost familiarity with many aspects of their own culture.

They had not used their own language during their years in Australia, so it was a matter of some embarrassment when they found they had difficulty speaking their language. Some experienced feelings of dislike for some aspects of the village lifestyle, feelings which caused them confusion at the time and shame later, after they had had time to re-adjust and to grieve the lost years.

The long period of absence was bad enough, but worse was the unintended, subtle continuous message that European culture equated with civilization and development. Over the years of absence in Australia there was no possibility of experiencing or learning more of the wisdom and riches of their own Melanesian ways during their young formative years. It was a loss they lived with throughout their lives.

The young men found great support from each other as they learned to cope with these problems of “re-entry”. Furthermore, they were busy men, as they embarked on their teaching mission at St. Joseph's Tenaru, or, in the case of Brother Raphael Tura, at Tarlena, and later Rigu on Bougainville.

**Later Work of the Pioneering Solomon Brothers**

Raphael Tura, Howard Sukuatu, Benedict Kinika, Chanel Diki, together with four of the six Bougainville pioneers, ultimately left the Marist Brothers Order. While this was naturally a cause of some disappointment and soul-searching for some Brothers at the time, a broader view of the life of these men reveals that, on leaving the Brothers, each contributed enormously, in his own way, to the development of his country and the education of its youth. They all retained strong connections and friendships with the Marists.

Raphael Tura worked at Rigu until 1960, and then returned to Australia, where he completed a course at Sydney Teachers' College. On his return, he taught at St. Joseph's, Tenaru until 1968, when he left the Brothers.
Later he joined the staff of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education in Honiara. He was involved in local Government for a time, and, in 2003, he had a son attending his old school at St. Joseph's, Tenaru.

Howard Sukuatu taught at Tenaru and for three years at Rigu. He left the Brothers in 1971 and returned to Avuavu, where he remained teaching for many years.

Alphonsus Laumanasa taught at Tenaru and Rigu. In 1961, he returned to Australia for a further year of study. His death at Tenaru on 25 March 1967 was the first among the Solomon Island Marist Brothers.

Chanel Diki spent the first decade of his teaching career at Tenaru. He and John Paul Mauro formed the first Melanesian community of Brothers at Rokera on Malaita Island. He left the Brothers in 1987 to become a priest. He died in 2002.

Edwin Meresininhinua taught in many schools and worked in formation for a time. After forty-seven years as a Marist Brother, he died at Tenaru in 2001 and was buried beside Alphonsus on the Tenaru property.

Benedict Kinika taught at Tenaru and Rigu before leaving the Brothers in 1969. Later, as a politician, he held the seat of East Makira for three terms and won respect as Minister of Finance. He retained close links with the Brothers until his death in 2003.

Thus the six Solomon Island pioneers who went to Australia as young boys to become Marist Brothers contributed much to the Marist endeavour in Solomon Islands and elsewhere. At the time of writing, 2003, both Malakia Sukuatu and John Tura are living in the Solomon Islands. These men, the pioneers of 1950, offer these words by way of closure for this chapter:

When I went to Australia in 1950, I experienced a drastic change in environment, culture and way of living. The main problems I had to face were the different food, the cold weather and coping with English, but, as time went on, I adjusted. When I was with the Brothers, I found a lot of cooperation and help from them, which made things easy. The Brothers were very helpful in many ways. I felt
I was cared for and my physical and spiritual needs were looked after. I am very grateful for that. When I left the Brothers, I took on the challenge of looking after my family and educating my children.

Malakia Sukuatu, 2003

Teaching with the Brothers was enjoyable because everybody was cooperative and supportive of one another. We all worked for the betterment of the school, instead of worrying about money and pay. We all worked for the glory of God in trying to touch the hearts of our students. I was disappointed that all my children were unable to enrol at St Joseph’s Tenaru. Most of my children did their secondary education at SDA and Anglican schools and this did not make me happy. Eight years after I left the Marist Brothers, I got married. I have appreciated very much the spirit of hard work and the practice of prayer every day and evening, which has become a part of my life. This has helped me to live successfully and happily until today. Going to Jesus through Mary is the source of peace, love, harmony, law and order, forgiveness and respect for each other. These are values which Solomon Islands needs very much today. I am grateful I spent some years as a Marist Brother. I still treasure my profession cross, which my sons use when they pray over sick people.

John Tura, 2003

Ben Kinika speaking at the grave of his friend Alphonsus Laumanasa on 3 June 1989 at the opening of Laumanasa House, at Tenaru.

See also the photo on page 206
Chapter 10

Brother John Paul Mauro's Story
1937-1963

The following is John Paul Mauro's own story of his early life, particularly his formation in Australia from December 1953 until January 1963. John Paul recorded these reflections in 2001; in 2003, he was working at St Gregory's Vocational School in Koromira, Bougainville.

Childhood Years

My name is Brother John Paul Mauro. I come from Koromira area, which is on the mainland of Bougainville, down towards the south of Bougainville. In comparison with other areas, or other Mission Stations, it could be described as small, maybe less than 6000 people. I come from good Catholic family background. My father grew up in the mission and then became a catechist. My mother was also brought up as a Catholic. She was a very good support for the work that my father was doing as a catechist. I was the first born. I grew up in the village of Moniasa. There were not many children at that time. I can remember only five of us, running around in the village, playing games with bows and arrows and racing each other, shooting at different objects on the road. Sometimes we would build small houses and play hunting a pig.

Later I went to school at the Koromira mission station. There would have been about sixty children in the school at that time, about thirty boys and thirty girls. Our teachers were Marist Sisters and the priest was a Marist. And we were organised to do our own cooking, to make our own gardens, sometimes making copra to get some money. We collected the nuts and the mission workmen smoked the copra. There were times, of course, when we used to have fun swimming in the river every weekend. We fished a lot, too, because we had to supply our own protein, while the cooks cooked the starch food from our own gardens.
I enjoyed life at that mission at Koromira, especially at the weekends, when I used to look forward to seeing my parents coming to the Church for Sunday, bringing food. Sometimes I would go back home with them to visit on Sundays.

The fact that people came in from both sides of the mission station for Mass was something great. It helped me realise there were more people than just people from my village. I would say it opened my eyes to realise that there were people from North, South, West, and East coming in, not only us who were from Moniasa village or Towra Village. So this experience taught me something that I will never forget, that I was part of a bigger world. I always looked forward to those Sunday celebrations.

**School Days at Rigu**

One day Brother Simeon and Brother Borgia arrived at Koromira. They were selecting students to go to their school at Rigu. Three of us were picked to go to Rigu. We were taken to Rigu by canoe. The captain of the crew was my father. We arrived at Rigu school about six o'clock. We were at the beach when the Rigu students were going to Tubiana mission for Benediction. We could hear them speaking in English. Then my father warned us, “Listen to those boys. That's what you must do when you go into Rigu High School.”

On their way back from Benediction the boys noticed us standing on the beach. They said, “You are the ones from Koromira.” They came and they took us to Simeon and Borgia's house. The Brothers took us to the dormitory. We were put into one dormitory which was for the young Juniors.

It was a very good feeling that Simeon accepted us with open arms and brought us to the dormitory and asked us if we needed anything, blankets, etc. So he gave us blankets and a sleeping mat. There were no pillows. So our introduction to Rigu was not strange, but a very welcoming one. I felt that I was welcome and I did not get homesick. I soon settled in.
Simeon and Borgia and some local teachers were our teachers at that
time. They taught us, not only in class, but also in the gardens. Most of
us had come from the villages without even knowing how to plant kaukau
(sweet potato), tapioca, cassava. We hadn't done much weeding. So,
while we were at Rigu, some of the things that were done by our women,
were taught to us. And we had to accept doing the women's work because
there were no women to do the work for us. There were also times for
sports. We played soccer, softball, athletics, too. We also had tennis
and swimming races in the sea.

But the thing that really opened my eyes was the realisation that there
were different types of people on our island of Bougainville. Now I
realised that there were people from Buka, Tinputz, Wakunai, Nagovis
and those areas from the northern end of Bougainville. So meeting all
these people from different areas at Rigu broadened my knowledge of
Bougainville.

One of the things that never happens now, and I am sure will never
happen in the future, was that the Brothers, every Saturday afternoon,
would line us up and they would give us a cake of soap and a stick of
tobacco. A cake of soap to wash ourselves, and, of course, a stick of
tobacco to smoke. The three of us from Koromira used to save the
tobacco, so, by the time the year ended we would have a good supply to
take home with us. But with the soap it was not the same. We used
soap more than we used tobacco.

The Brothers were really faithful to their prayers. Early in the morning
they would get up and say the Office. This was said in Latin and we
used to listen to them. They said it in choir, and in this way they were
able to inspire us students to get interested in prayer. Every morning
and evening they would pray together. The students, too, used to have
morning and evening prayers, and a visit to the Chapel before our lunch.
This was something which we took as part of our life at Rigu.

A memorable day was when four of our men left for Australia to become
Marist Brothers. They were Bernard Kangku, Michael Kaminei, Joseph
Gohan and Joseph Luhwaku. We were on the beach, looking at the seaplane flying with our four men out of Kieta Harbour.

As soon as the aeroplane hid behind the island of Pokpok, somebody shouted that there was a tidal wave. The best place to watch it was from the lagoon. So, many of us ran to the lagoon and watched the ebb and flow of the sea. When the water receded, the reef was exposed, and many fish were trapped. Many of the people were out on the reef collecting the fish. As we were enjoying this, a man who knew about tidal waves warned us about the eighth wave, to be careful, because, when the eighth wave came, it would be the big one. When it came, it took us so suddenly that we did not know what happened. But we did see the bridge that goes across the lagoon lifted, twisted and dumped into the lagoon. Simeon and the rest of us ran towards Tubiana Station. Simeon shouted, “Do not worry about your goods, worry about your life! Come follow me.” So we went up to Tubiana mission and stayed there until the evening, when Simeon told us to go and have a look at our things in the dormitory but not to sleep there. We were to come back to Tubiana and sleep in the classrooms.

We were able to go and look around and see if our goods were still intact in the houses. Unfortunately, not much was left in the dormitories because the walls were made of bamboo, so the sea just took everything into the lagoon, making our school a sea of water. The flood remained for a day. Many things were under the water for a day. A big decision was then left to the Brothers: would they rebuild Rigu or move the school somewhere else? It was a worry, for they were expecting a similar disaster to happen again. So that was the beginning of the plan to open a school at Tarlena. But it was not going to happen during my time.

**John Paul Makes a Life Decision**

It was about that time that I began to think about joining the Marist Brothers, following in the footsteps of the first four. There were three of us interested in joining the Brothers, Joseph Pulau, Tony Langai and myself. It doesn't mean that we were going to have another tidal wave,
but maybe the Brothers were expecting something like that when we left. However, it did not happen.

I had a good relationship with Borgia, Simeon, and, later on, Brother Jude. This was a very special time. I did not fear the Brothers. I used to like them. So much so that when Borgia was going on holiday once, he was joking with me, saying, “John, you come with me, carry my bags and we will go to Australia.” I felt good inside. I sort of took it as something real. But when he was going away, he said goodbye to us. I felt let down.

When Simeon was sick, Borgia used to call me up to Simeon's room. He asked me to sit down beside the bed. He gave me a book to read in order to send Simeon to sleep. They were special times.

At other times Borgia would ask me and another friend to go out fishing for the Brothers when the others went to work, especially on Sundays. Our job was to fish for the Brothers while the others worked in the gardens.

Jude came later on and joined Simeon and Borgia. He was a very kind man. He never got angry. When he did get angry, I used to feel that he was not going to hit anybody.

When I look back, I realise I was building up some kind of relationship with the Brothers and they probably were aware of that. One day we wrote down on a piece of paper what we were going to do after leaving school. As we were going for our visit one lunch hour, Borgia asked me what I wrote on the piece of paper. I told him I wanted to be a teacher. Then Borgia said, “Do you realise that you can be a Marist Brother and a teacher, or a Marist Teaching Brother?” I said, “No.” Borgia said, “Well, can you go and think about it?” I replied, “Yes, Brother.” But when I went away I forgot all about it.

Not long after, it was the feast of Corpus Christi, which was always a great celebration in St. Joseph's Rigu and the combined Tubiana Mission. We were out cutting small shrubs to decorate the road. I was cutting the
branches to take home when the branch I was standing on broke, leaving the axe stuck in a branch up above. I was on the ground when the axe fell and it gave me a deep cut on my hand. Then the boys brought me to Borgia. Borgia looked at it and said, “Oh, that's nasty.” He took me to the hospital and they sewed it up.

So, one Sunday I was sitting on the beach alone, in my canoe, just facing the sea and watching the ocean, immersing my soul. The others had gone to the bush or the gardens. Simeon came from his house, just behind where I was sitting. He greeted me. His first question was, “Are you thinking about what Borgia has asked you to think about?” I said, “No Brother, I am just thinking of the sea, looking at it going up and down.” Then Simeon told me about the Marist Brothers' schools in Australia.

Soon after that, Borgia asked the three of us to go home and tell our parents that the Brothers were going to send us to Australia to join the Marist Brothers. So I went home. It wasn't easy to tell my mother. My mother said, “If that is what you want, go ahead.” But I was frightened to talk about it with my father. At the time my relationship with my father was not good.

Anyway, after a week, my father brought me back to Rigu. Simeon was there to meet us. The next question he asked me was, “Did you ask your parents about becoming a Brother? What did they say?” “I asked my mother,” I said, “and she said I could go ahead if that was what I really wanted. But, my father, I was frightened to ask him.” Then Simeon said, “You scallywag. OK, I will go and see him.” So he took my father into the older men's house, sat on the bed and talked. He came back and said to me, “Your father won't stop you if that is what you really want to do. He said it is all right for you to go ahead.” So, there again, Simeon helped me out with a little problem I had with my father.

So after that the Brothers took us for meals, to teach us how to use knives and forks, and how to drink from a cup. Later, we went by boat
up to the Administration Centre on Sohano Island in Buka Passage to pick up our passports.

**Journey to Australia**

Soon afterwards, two of us, Joseph Pulau and I, were on the aeroplane for Australia. As we took off from Kieta Harbour, we could see our schoolmates, running along the beach, waving to us. I was touched by that and started weeping. Joseph Pulau said to me, “No ken wari John, bai yumi kam bek. Bai lukin ol.” [Don't worry, John. We'll be coming home again and we will see our friends.] It was a strange statement because we never did come back to see them. By the time we came back, most of them were married men, some of them holding jobs. But at the time it was a comforting thought. We were fifteen years of age when we left Bougainville in December 1953.

We went from Buka to Rabaul. We had a good time in Rabaul where the Christian Brothers at Vuvu accommodated us. It was at Vuvu, at the Christian Brothers, that I first used a flush toilet. After I did my business, I did not know what to do. I looked around carefully and I noticed a chain. I pulled that down, and sure enough, the water ran out and carried away the waste.

Then the Brothers served us a meal. We sat with them at the table. We were able to use the forks and knives, which we had been shown to do by Brothers Simeon and Borgia. Then, for the dessert, we used a spoon, as shown us. We used a cup for drinking tea, without making noise. We were able to practise all those new things we had learned before arriving in Australia.

Next morning we flew from Rabaul to Cairns. It was a long trip and we had to stop somewhere for fuel. Then it was on to Sydney, where we landed at Rose Bay. Brother Andrew, the Provincial, was waiting for us with Brother Jude Featherstone's sister-in-law and niece.

After greeting us, Andrew offered us a cup of tea and biscuits before we drove to St. Joseph's, Hunters Hill. So we sat down there and Andrew
asked us a question, “Do you want tea or coffee?” Both of us answered, “Yes.” Mrs Featherstone looked at Andrew who said, “This is the way they answer. They do not know the difference yet, but they will learn.” So Andrew gave us a cup of tea each. After enjoying our cup of tea and biscuits, we said goodbye to Mrs Featherstone and her daughter.

After the drive to Hunters Hill, we arrived at this big building. We had to go upstairs, many stairs, into the infirmary of that school.

We had a comfortable rest that night. When we looked out the window, all you could see were lights, all different lights, different colours. It was amazing.

Next morning Andrew took us to the College chapel. We were able to go to Mass. I was really struck by the big size of St Joseph's chapel, with its stained glass windows, which told a story in pictures. We were surprised by the size of the altar, the cleanliness of the floor. Everything was just beautiful.

After Mass we were taken to the Brothers' dining room and given breakfast. I remember it was corn flakes, bacon and eggs, and tea. We ate very slowly, still not being used to the Australian way of eating. I was hoping to get to our friends at Bowral quickly, longing to see other Melanesians.

**Bowral Juniorate**

After breakfast Andrew took us by train out into the city and then he bought us long trousers, shirts, socks, shoes, coat, warm clothes, everything that we would need at Bowral, which, he knew, is a cold place. In addition to our small case, each of us now had another suitcase and all new clothing.

Our trip to Bowral was an enjoyable one. Because of the sealed road I could not feel any bumps, the bus just running smoothly, except for corners, and so forth, when we slowed down. We did the distance easily in about one and a half hours, and we arrived just as our friends were
getting ready for lunch. So they all came out and greeted us. There were Bernard Kangku, Michael Kaminei, Joseph Gohan, and Joseph Luhwaku, and the Solomon Islanders, Benedict Kinika, Alphonsus Laumanasa, Edwin Meresinihinua.

They took us into the parlour and we all sat down and talked. Of course, we simply answered the questions that were asked. All the things that we saw, and the bigness of the new place overawed us.

Our friends, our Melanesian Brothers, took us and showed us our dormitories. We would share rooms with other Solomon Islanders or Bougainvilleans. Then we went to get something to eat. That day was a day to settle down and answer questions from our young men who were there.

Many who went to the Bowral Juniorate regret they went there. But I look at it as a place where I was brought up in my religious knowledge. I learned from Brother Brian Horton something more about Mary. He made Mary more alive to me. We also learned a bit more about Champagnat.

Brother William was our Junior Master. We had a very enjoyable programme. I call it enjoyable because it was balanced. We had time for picnics and outings together. Sometimes, when it was too hot in the afternoon, we would go for a swim in the baths.

The first time William took us to the baths it was an experience in itself. We were lined up outside the gate, and at the gate there were two young girls who were collecting and checking the names or whatever, and each of us had to pass through the gate. I was struck that these young ladies were wearing swimming togs. It was unusual for us to see swimming togs. I had never seen ladies from the Islands having things like that. I was dumbfounded, almost awe struck. William noticed me staring and brought me back to normal by saying, “Come on John, we've got to move on.” When I went into the baths, I saw more people there, swimming. I got frightened. It was a different kind of life. It was not the same thing as an evil spirit or something, but I didn't go in.
At the Bowral Juniorate we learned how to work in the gardens, cut firewood, look after vegetables, look after flower gardens, and clean up the house. It was the Solomon Islanders' job to scrub the dining room floor every second Saturday of the month. We used to enjoy it, because, after that we had warm Milo or coffee before we retired to bed. I felt this job was given to us because we were older than the other Australian Juniors. Most of us were fifteen or over, but they were under fifteen.

I also learned other sports - like tennis, cricket, rugby league, soccer and hockey. There were some very good players. William, our Junior Master, was very proud of them. He used to ask a local coach to come and coach them. Believe it or not, that year, the Juniors won the Bowral Cup. William was very happy.

We had three people from the Solomons and Bougainville playing in the team. Bernard Kangku was the goalie, and Benedict Laumanasa was the Centre Forward, and Michael Diki was one of the wingers.

When the team was playing well during the competition, William was standing at the side and shouting, “Come on boys, come on boys!” One of the opposition shouted out from the side, “Shut up, you old man!” But William didn't hear. He continued to cheer our boys until they won the game.

The Brothers at the Juniorate were special to me. Brother William was our Junior Master, Brother Cyrillus (Brian Horton) was his assistant, and there were two teachers, Brother Hugh and Brother Denis. When William got sick and was taken to Richmond hospital, Brother Terence Mullany took over. Terence struck me differently from William. I felt that, instead of coming out watching us working, he would stand at the window and watch us. I felt a bit annoyed about that because I was not trusted and the others were not trusted. Overall though, he was a very good Junior Master, and we cooperated with him. He was younger than William, of course.
Mittagong Juniorate

After I finished Form Two in Bowral, I was moved to Mittagong, which was a Senior Juniorate. Bernard Kangku and the other Melanesians, instead of staying with us, went up to the Novitiate. So, in Form Three at Mittagong I was the only Melanesian with the Australian boys. Anyhow, I enjoyed their company and took part actively in whatever we did - study, sports, wood drives and work in the garden. [The wood drive was a day's work, involving the entire school, collecting and transporting firewood for the school's wood fuel stove and boiler]

One of the famous jobs that I had was to carry water from the septic well and water the young apple trees. Instead of turning up my nose at the job, I just lifted the bucket with the smelly water, picked it up by the handle and went and watered the trees I was supposed to water.

The vegetable garden with Brother Eusebius was a special job. Eusebius taught us how to grow carrots, beetroots, spinach, cabbages, you name it. They grew very well. We supplied vegetables for our kitchen. Here at the Senior Juniorate we didn't have as many picnics as we had at Bowral Junior Juniorate, but we had a few more wood drives than we did at Bowral.

One year, there was snow which almost covered our house. We got up early with the dawn before the snow melted. There was a snow fight. After we covered each other with snow, it was very painful to wash under warm water.

Brother Charles Howard was appointed to take over the Senior Juniorate. He was very, very personal in all his ways. He took special interest in all the juniors and I was not shy to ask him if I could go home for a holiday at Christmas. He did write to my parish priest at Koromira, but the priest wrote back to Charles, telling him it would be better for me to become a Brother before I went back. Charles told me, and I accepted that decision. It was about that time that my companion Joseph Pulau decided to return home to Bougainville.
Another special thing that came into the Juniorate for the first time was black and white television. We were able to watch television on Sundays and some Saturdays. It was something new. I liked watching it.

**Novitiate and Scholasticate**

In 1960, after three years at the Mittagong Juniorate, I moved up to the Novitiate, which was about half a kilometre away, separated by a hill. Our novitiate group had about 15. Brothers Ethelred and Owen looked after us. Ethelred was our novice master and Owen was our Director. Brother Alan was in charge of the farm. He showed us how to milk cows and how to kill cows for our meat.

Learning the gospel of Sunday by heart was not easy, but I was able to remember some lines and, when we were asked to quote some lines, I was able to respond. Some of our Novices were very good. They could say the whole Gospel by heart, from beginning to the end. I admired them very much. They had a special gift to remember what they read, maybe because they were familiar with English. I was not, because English was my third language.

I liked the three Brothers, Brother Ethelred, Brother Owen and Brother Alan. They were very good to me and I grew to know more about prayer, more about our Founder, more about the Blessed Virgin Mary, more about God himself.

Once my parish priest wrote to me because he noticed that there were letters arriving every week, so he wrote and asked me, “John, what's happening? Are you coming back so soon?” I wrote back and I quoted from the bible, “If a man puts his hand on the plough and looks back, he is not worthy of me.” So the priest did not worry again about the continuing amount of mail for my parents.

The great day arrived, 2 July 1960. The novices and postulants drove down to St Joseph's Hunters Hill for the ceremonies of first profession and receiving the habit. After the ceremony, it was great to see ourselves in the black habit, the cloak and the rabat; we were calling each other
Brother. Not just John Paul, but Brother John Paul. And if somebody called the other by his name, without using the title ‘Brother’, then he was told to use the title.

After the ceremony we left the newly professed young Brothers to move to their new communities, and we, the novices, withdrew to Mittagong. On the way we were practising calling each other Brother.

The twelve months of the Novitiate went quickly. For about four months or so we did not have a novice master; he was sick in the hospital. While he was in the hospital, visiting Brothers and visiting priests used to come and give us talks on different topics. But when we were not having lectures, we used to go out on wood drives or work on a garden at Webb’s [a nearby block of land owned by the Brothers]. We were helping a gentleman who was making a garden there. So there was no time to be idle. We were always occupied.

The time to choose our religious names came. We decided what names to take as a Brother. Many of us had already picked the name when the news came from the Novice Master that we could keep our own names. So, many of us in our group kept our own names. We were really the first ones to be under that new rule. So, instead of taking Brother Anthony, I stayed with my name, Brother John Paul.

On 2 July 1961, I left Mittagong and ended up at Dundas Scholasticate, while others went to different schools to teach for six months, I went straight to the Scholasticate, and there I had eighteen months of doing the Victorian Registration Course with some Brothers from Melbourne and a couple of others from the Solomons and Bougainville. Most of the others were studying at the University.

I found teaching practice was very exciting and challenging. Brother Ronald Fogarty encouraged me, speaking into his tape recorder as he observed my lessons. He told me that the method I was using was good, and he encouraged me to continue.
Return to Bougainville

My Scholasticate came to an end in January 1963, when I left for Bougainville, St. Joseph's Rigu High School. I was returning to the school I left in 1953.

When I arrived at the airport, my parents, my sisters and Brother Clarence were waiting. Clarence was the superior and headmaster. When I greeted my parents, I spoke to them in English. I shook their hands and I realised that I was thinking in English rather than in my language. No English was spoken after that!

Clarence then left me at the airport with my parents and went off to attend to some business. So I spent an hour or so with my parents in the small saksak house which was the terminal in those days. My mother told me all the stories about my family and the village.

After speaking for a long while, she said, “Yes, he has been too long away from home. That's why he cannot speak back to me in his own language.” That certainly was very touching and made me feel sad. I could not speak to my family in my own language. However, I could understand what they were talking about.

After an hour or so Clarence came back from Aropa plantation. He picked me up in the truck and my parents were taken back by tractor to Koromira. So I went with Clarence to St Joseph's Rigu High School. On the way to Rigu Clarence and I conversed. Clarence told me about Rigu and all the things that had happened in the school since I left. In nine years a lot had changed, but some things were still the same. The villagers were still there, as they were before I left for Australia. But there were some signs of the company BCL [Bougainville Copper Limited] coming in to start up the copper mine.

When we arrived at Rigu, there were other Brothers there who welcomed me. Of course, my friends Brothers Borgia, Simeon and Jude had gone. In fact, Simeon had died just six months before I arrived home. They were all new Brothers - Brothers Clarence, Cornelius, Joseph Luhwaku,
Alphonsus Laumanasa, Martin Connell and some others. There were more Brothers than lay teachers.

It was great to have a couple of Melanesian Brothers there when I returned. They were very good to me, especially when I first arrived back, teaching with them. With the Melanesian Brothers there, I felt more comfortable.

![John Paul Mauro fishing at Tsiroge 1999](image)

**Teaching Career Begins at Rigu**

As far as I can remember, I was asked to teach Grade Five. Later, other Melanesian Brothers taught with me at Rigu. Brother Michael, who later became Father Michael, was teaching mostly Grade Six. Brother Edwin was teaching Grade Four. When Edwin went to Solomon Islands,
Brother Howard took his place at Kieta. So the number of Melanesian Brothers was stable at three. Then we had the other Australian Brothers who were teaching in the secondary - Forms One, Two and Three.

It was a great joy for me to be teaching in the school which I had attended. I was now a teacher and a Brother, at a different stage of my life. I had different kinds of relationships now that I was in my mid-twenties. We were all one family, Marist Brothers. My feelings, too, were more mature.

Another change took place. Benedict Kinika came up to Kieta from the Solomons and Howard went back to Solomon Islands. Benedict Kinika taught in the secondary. At that time we were gradually getting rid of the primary and trying to build up secondary only. I was teaching Grade Five and Michael Kaminei taught Grade Six.

I related well with Benedict Kinika. Sometimes we would go out together for a picnic or a walk along the beach. We used to spend the whole day together and in the evening come back to the community. That was very helpful for my vocation and personal development.

When I went home for Easter I was able to converse with my parents and sisters in Kieta language mostly and, where possible, I was able to say things in Koromira language. But the Kieta language, which I was using regularly at Rigu, helped me to be able to remember the way we used to talk in Koromira language. But still I was not fluent. Sometimes the people said to me “You're speaking like a child who is learning to speak our language!” To that I would say, “That's true, I am!” And we had a good laugh and enjoyed each other's company.
Chapter 11

Developments in Bougainville

1949 – 1965

The 1950s saw a gradual development of Bougainville and New Guinea generally, in line with the Australian post-war policy of development for the Territory, which was based on a multi-racial society, where expatriates essentially controlled the economic activity. Meanwhile the Government worked slowly towards ensuring that the local people were literate and moderately affluent, the hope being that locals would provide a workforce, well-treated and well-paid, for the large-scale expatriate projects, which at the time consisted mainly of plantations.

Brothers and Local Culture in the Fifties

The Brothers fitted naturally into the expatriate community in central Bougainville. They had good relationships with some of the planters and Government officials and were occasionally invited to official functions. In those days, the Brothers had minimal contact with the locals and rarely visited villages. The students of the 1950s did not expect the Brothers to be familiar with local customs and culture. Francis Aniona, a Rigu student in the 1950s, who died in 2002, spoke about the Brothers' relationships with the locals, and their interaction with local culture at the time:

Back in the 50s the Brothers stayed in the school. In the early years they did not move out too much. They didn't interfere much about culture, they didn't go out to the villages. They concentrated on their teaching. Teaching the boys about European ways, they didn't bother about the culture. I can say they didn't even know Pidgin. The rule was we must speak English. They didn't worry about Pidgin. But that did not concern us too much. We were brought up in the villages and then we came to school and learned many things, more or less in the European way. Then, when we went home, we went under our parents and we had to learn our own customs.
An Australian Brother commented about the lack of knowledge of cultural issues among the early Brothers:

Nobody had heard of the word “culture”. We didn't even know we had one ourselves. You simply went in, you did what you did in Australia, in the same way. There was no thought of culture or things related to culture. That sensitivity didn't come until the seventies, I think. In the seventies, thanks to developments like the Melanesian Institute, there was an awakening of this. Certainly, a few of our early Brothers had a very colonial attitude. They went there with “divine right” almost. Yes, we probably made a lot of mistakes, in the name of running a good school. And we did run good schools in terms of what we achieved. But we probably walked on some of the culture without realising it. There may be some who attended our semi-colonial schools who now harbour a bit of resentment. It's one of the reasons why I would think twice about going back.

**Rapid Developments at Rigu**

In March 1949 the boys moved out of “Tent City”, the seven large tents set up on the beach, which had been home for the previous seven months. The boys liked the new sleeping arrangements, but complained of the cold on the first night in their new airy, spacious dormitory. After a two-month break from classes, during which the dormitories were completed, school resumed on 14 March. In May the chapel was complete and Father Scieller SM said the first Mass on 10 May, his 73rd birthday. By August a lighting plant was installed, which provided electric lights to all buildings. “What a change from the old and troublesome pressure lamps!”

A regular stream of visitors observed the transformation as the new school rose from nothing. In August four Bishops visited together, one of whom was Bishop Arkfeld, the “flying Bishop” of Wewak. Later, Bishop Scharmach (Rabaul) and Bishop Aubin (Solomons) also visited. The arrival of Brother Jude Featherstone on 6 December was a welcome addition to the staff.

Brother Simeon was the architect, foreman and main tradesman for the construction of all Rigu buildings from 1948 until 1960, when Brother Clarence Cunningham became headmaster and took responsibility for the school's further development. Simeon pushed himself to the limit,
and his health, always somewhat fragile, began to show the strain, even during his early years at Rigu. In March 1950, suffering from serious kidney problems and complications from a botched tooth extraction, he travelled to Australia for four months for treatment. Later that year Brother Borgia also had an extended stay in Australia for medical treatment. When Borgia returned in March 1951, Jude was transferred to Rabaul for a few months, to assist the Chinese Brothers there. About this time a large statue of Marcellin Champagnat was erected in a central position in the school. That statue remains as one of the few recognizable features at the Rigu site after the school's destruction during the Bougainville crisis.

**Sea Damage to School Buildings**

In the final days of 1951 disaster hit the school in the form of a king tide or mini-tidal wave. Baimbai, care-taking the school while the Brothers were at a retreat on Buka Island, rose at midnight on 27 December to check the property and found the entire campus awash with sea water. The wave had eroded a section of foreshore, virtually destroying the chapel, a classroom and the wharf. Other buildings were extensively damaged. Borgia recorded in the annals, “The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away. God's will be done.” Within days, the Brothers were at work, re-building. As Simeon was sick with Scrub Typhus, Borgia directed much of the re-building work. By April, the rebuilt chapel was ready for use.

**Provincial Visit – First Candidates – Borgia's Long Walk – Another Tidal Wave**

Later in 1952, the Provincial, Brother Andrew Power, made his first visit to Kieta. Following this visit, four young men, Joseph Gohan, Henry Kangku, Joseph Luhwaku and Gabriel Kaminei, decided to join the Marist Brothers, a decision which would take them to Australia. In 2000, Henry Kangku (Brother Bernard) recalled the visit of Borgia to his village to secure the necessary permission for him to go to Australia:

In those early days the ex-pat Brothers did not move around the villages much, partly because it was difficult for them to travel the bush tracks. The road
system came later. I remember the only time Borgia came down to Siwai was 1951 when he accompanied Gabriel Kamie, Joseph Luhwaku and myself to get approval from our families to allow us to join the Brothers. We took the mission boat around to the west coast near Mamarego and then we walked with Borgia to our mission at Monoitu. It was a big walk, a distance of more than fifty kilometres, from five in the morning until seven at night. Borgia did not know the distance. As we were walking, he'd say, “How far is it?” We'd say, “Not very far Brother, maybe one mile to go.” Borgia would time it, and, when we'd walked about a mile, Borgia said, “We must be nearly home now.” And then we'd extend it and say, “Not very far to go, about another mile.” We didn't know the exact distance. We have a famous Tok Pisin saying, *longwe liklik* [a fairly long distance] We don't worry about the exact time it takes. Anyway, we got there eventually. We left Borgia at the mission and went to our various villages to inform our families. In my case, since my parents had died, I asked my brother, Leo Lising, to come with me to see Borgia. Leo, who had been at school at Chabai with the Brothers, knew Pidgin and English too, and was able to communicate very well with Borgia. When Borgia asked him a few questions about me, he replied, “I'm happy that he wants to become a Marist Brother.” Before we came back to Rigu, I went to say goodbye to my sister's family. She was reluctant to let me go, but my brother-in-law told her, “Don't worry, he'll be back soon.” But for nine years I didn't come back. On my return, I was pleased to see my sister's family increased and living happily. Now she has many grandchildren. It's always a pleasant family re-union when I go home to see them.

The day the four young men left for Sydney, 4 November 1952, a second tidal wave struck Kieta harbour and the school suffered even worse damage than occurred only ten months earlier. Fortunately, there were no injuries. The Annals record the sorry sight following the wave:

What a mess met the eye everywhere. The beach was washed out; a great channel had been cut from the boys' dining room to the beach. The rear of the chapel was suspended in mid-air. Not a thing was left in the dining room or kitchen. A couple of tons of rice, with sugar, salt and tea were soaked with seawater. The dormitories were a wreck, and all other houses damaged to some extent. Books and paper, together with the radio and batteries, were swimming in water. In the workshop, machinery and tools were under water. Most of the boys' belongings had been swept away. The mangrove trees along the lagoon proved a great blessing, as they had caught almost all the articles carried away by the water.

The Catalogue of Tsunamis for New Guinea / Solomon Islands maintained by the Rabaul Vulcanological Observatory records that a
The huge earthquake – 8.4 on the Richter Scale – caused this wave, which, at Kieta, reached a height of 2.4 metres. The epicenter of the earthquake was at Kamchatka in the Northern Pacific, some 6,700 kilometres north of New Guinea. The wave, travelling at more than 500 km/hr, took thirteen hours to reach New Guinea.

The clean-up took a week and a half. Bishop Wade inspected the damage some weeks later and immediately decided to relocate the school to Chabai at the northern end of the island. Within a week, however, the plan was changed. The school was to stay at the Rigu site for a year, until new buildings were erected at Tarlena, just north of Chabai. In fact, the school remained at Rigu for a further thirty-seven years, until it closed at the time of the Bougainville crisis. While occasional high tides and coastal erosion caused later problems, there was never another major tidal wave.

Mr Lawrie Chan

It was around this time that Mr Lawrie Chan donated a boat to the Brothers. It was one of his many gifts. Lawrie was an ex-student of St Joseph's College, Sydney, and throughout his life remained close to the Brothers. During World War II, Lawrie resided on Buka Island and was employed by the Japanese as an interpreter because he could read Japanese script. It was Lawrie who provided the Brothers with information about the last days of the three Chabai Brothers, who were imprisoned and killed by Japanese forces in 1942. In the early 1950s he was affiliated to the Institute in recognition of his long friendship and outstanding generosity. Lawrie operated trade stores at Rabaul, Buka and Toniva, near Rigu. His son Michael, who was also an ex-student, managed the Toniva store. In 1975 Lawrie left PNG to live in Sydney where he died in 1984.

A Community Opens at Tarlena

The discussions about the relocation of Rigu to the northern end of the island resulted in a new plan, which involved opening a small school at Tarlena for catechists and teachers. Borgia, the leader of the new community, left for Tarlena 18 February 1954, a notable day at Rigu for
several reasons: during his visit that day Bishop Wade gave approval, and the princely sum of fifty pounds for the employment of the first local teacher, John Dakeni; at the same time, Baimbai and Kaki became employees of the school, Baimbai to cook for the Brothers, Kaki to assist with laundry and cleaning. It was a happy arrangement which would continue for many years until Baimbai’s retirement. Simeon became the new headmaster of Rigu in place of Borgia.

Brother Ephrem Stevens, returning to the missions after a year in Australia, joined Borgia later. In his first entry in the Tarlena Annals, Borgia explains the purpose of the new school:

I arrived here with twenty-three boys from Kieta on 22 February 1954. Ephrem arrived about a fortnight later. Two boys later were admitted to the school, bringing the total to twenty-five pupils, at which the roll now stands. This institution is to admit only boys who intend to become priests, Brothers or mission teachers. All are to pass through Kieta before coming here and all should have attained sixth grade standard. Here they proceed to their higher studies, according to the Government Syllabus, and then go to the Juniorate or Minor Seminary or the teacher training course.

A great pioneer returned to Australia at the end of 1956: after nine years in Bougainville, Borgia left Tarlena for health reasons, as Ephrem's opening Annals entry of 1957 explains:

In the latter part of 1956 Borgia suffered continuously from varicose ulcers, and there seemed little hope of a cure in this climate. Brother reluctantly returned to Sydney in December 1956. His place was taken by Brother Kevin Eaton, who arrived in March 1957 to take over the teacher training, for which he was so well qualified, holding degrees in Arts and Education.

Borgia maintained a lifetime interest in the missions and, while in Australia, was of great assistance to the Brothers on Bougainville for many years. He returned to Rigu for a year in 1975, but was forced to return home at the end of that year with further health problems. He died in 1983. Borgia's replacement at Tarlena, Kevin, achieved an enormous amount for teacher education on the island. Intelligent, committed and hard-working, he was a great asset to the school and to the teacher training effort on Bougainville. He produced textbooks for the course and, later at Rigu, became sufficiently fluent in Central
Bougainville’s Nasioi language to produce teaching materials in that language. Kevin explains some of the difficulties which eventually led to the return of the teacher training school to Rigu:

I spent a year at Tarlena but it was not suitable for teacher training since there was no practice school handy. We had to take the boat to Buka Passage and go up to the school at Hahela or across the island to Hantoa, both very time-consuming. The boat trip was slow and the jeep trip across to Hantoa was almost as bad, because of the state of the bush track. I could beat the jeep by riding my pushbike. It was thought that Kieta might be a much better place, because there was a mission school a few hundred yards along the beach. So at the end of 1957 the teacher training section moved back to Kieta. That was much more satisfactory.

When Kevin and his teacher trainees returned to Kieta, the remaining staff comprised Ephrem Stevens and the Solomon Islands Brother, Raphael Tura, newly arrived from his training in Australia. The school enrolment was forty-five boys, in two classes. Brother Francis Borgia McGinty arrived in 1959, and another pioneer returned to Australia at the end of that year. Ephrem Stevens, who had opened the mission at Marau before the war, returned to open Tenaru in 1946 and then Tarlena in 1954. He resumed teaching in Australia and died at Ashgrove, Queensland, in 1988, at the age of eighty-one years.

At Ashgrove Ephrem taught young Ken McDonald in Grade Five. Ken later became a Marist Brother and taught for many years on Bougainville. He recalls the influence of Ephrem on his vocation decision:
Ephrem was my class teacher in Grade Five at Ashgrove. Every Religion period we got a Solomon Islands or Bougainville story, amazing stories, Ephrem stories, obviously exaggerated, but he had a great love for the place. The stories enthralled me. One of the few things I remember clearly about my Primary education is Ephrem's stories. They caught my imagination completely. I think it was his courage that came through, his desire to go out on a limb for other people. That was what first got me thinking about doing something similar myself.

Simeon transferred from Kieta to replace Ephrem as headmaster of Tarlena. In 1961 Simeon was joined by Brother Elwyn (Martin) Connell, aged twenty-six, and fresh from his final profession, the youngest Brother to be appointed to the missions.

At this time, the school was self-sufficient in food, kaukau and taro being the staples. “Bimbo”, the bullock, pulled many a cartload of kaukau from the garden to the school's kitchen. Elwyn remembers Simeon, some details of school life and the closure of the school at the end of 1961:

> Sim was a wonderful man, in so far as he could do many different things. He knew about building, he knew about animals, he knew how machines ran, he could do plumbing and electrical work; he was multi-skilled. He was very direct with students, but he also got things done. He was a no-frills man. The boys in those days wore a red laplap. That was it. That was their school uniform. We just had the two classes, one class of Grade Seven, and one class of Grade Eight. There would have been something like forty in each class. They came at the beginning of the year by the boat to Tsiroge and they'd walk over to Tarlena with their few belongings. From what I remember, they stayed the whole year with us.

By this time the mission authorities had opened discussions about recombining the two schools, Tarlena and Rigu. The main reason seems to have been the small size of the Tarlena School, which closed at the end of 1961. The buildings were later used as a vocational school for girls, conducted by the local Sisters of Nazareth. The Marist Brothers returned to Tarlena in 1993 when Brother Ken McDonald and Brother Bernard McGrath began teaching at Bishop Wade High School, while living at Tsiroge with the male students. A Marist community re-opened at Tarlena in 1999.
Staff Problems at Rigu

From 1954 to 1957 there were only two Brothers at Rigu. Neither Simeon nor Jude enjoyed continuous robust health; nevertheless, the demanding work of rebuilding, running the school and providing it with food continued. From time to time, one or other of them was absent for treatment or recuperation. At the beginning of the 1956 school year, neither of them was able to resume duties so Father LeBreton SM looked after the school for two months in their absence. At the end of September that year, Jude returned to Australia for treatment for suspected tuberculosis, and Francis Borgia McGinty from Tenaru relieved for several months. In 1957 Brother Clarence Cunningham was a welcome addition to the staff for one year. This young and energetic Brother was a great support to Simeon and rapidly learned the ways of life on Bougainville, knowledge that would serve him well when he returned as the school's headmaster in 1960. In 1958 the staffing problems were relieved by the transfer of Kevin Eaton, with his teacher trainees, from Tarlena to Rigu and the appointment of the school's first Melanesian Brother, Edwin Meresinihinua. Brother Joseph Luhwaku, who was among the first four Bougainvillean juniors who left for Australia in 1952, joined them in 1959. Joseph was the first of the Bougainville four to be professed, in the same profession group as the first four Solomon Brothers, which included Edwin. Joseph made his final profession in Sydney in January 1963 and left the Brothers in December 1965. In 1968, he was elected to the Territory's House of Assembly as the Regional Member for Bougainville but was defeated in the 1972 poll by Father John Momis. Joseph died later in Bougainville.

A New Chapel and New Classroom

From May 1958 to August 1959 Simeon supervised the construction of a magnificent new chapel for the school. Clarence Cunningham describes it:

Simeon was very good with his hands. He built the chapel, put a concrete floor in, made all the furniture. Of course, the floor sank in the middle. He didn't realise that he built it over the old air raid shelter from the war years. It was a fine chapel with bamboo walls. He hired an old man, who made the walls, split
the bamboo with an axe and wove it. All the vases were shell cases from the war. Clam shells were the holy water fonts. It was a lovely chapel. He made all the furnishings as well. The students helped with a lot of it.

From the Annals of 1959:

The new chapel is a thing of beauty, with its general colour scheme of blue and silver, relieved by the grey of the sanctuary floor and the gold framing of the Stations of the Cross. Varnished woodwork gives an air of brightness and neatness. For night use, fluorescent lighting illuminates the chapel.

Interior of Chapel built by Simeon and helpers

At the same time Simeon built an additional classroom to solve a space problem in the school, as the Annals of 1959 record:

For the past fifteen months we have had four teachers and only three classrooms. A fairly large room in the Brothers' house has been doing duty as a classroom, but it is too small for the purpose and there is the added nuisance of boys in the Brothers' house. The mission promised labour to build a new classroom, as Simeon and the boys were fully engaged on the chapel. The materials duly arrived but not the promised labour. Eventually, Simeon obtained local labour and, just before Easter, a start was made under his supervision.
Somehow, Simeon found time to be a full-time teacher as well! At the end of 1959 he had completed his canonical six years as leader of the community at Rigu and was transferred to Tarlena.

**A New Headmaster and a New Era at St Joseph's, Rigu**

Clarence Cunningham returned to Rigu as headmaster at the beginning of 1960. He was born in 1923 and grew up in Sydney. At a young age he had already been a successful headmaster of two Australian schools. At Rigu in 1960 there were one hundred students, a third of whom were trainee-teachers. The following year saw further staff changes as Brother Cornelius Keating replaced Kevin Eaton, and Bernard Kangku, who had recently returned from Australia, replaced Joseph Luhwaku. Severinus Ampaoi, a respected lay teacher, also joined the staff. From 1961, Michael Roberts, a volunteer from Melbourne, Australia, was of great assistance in the construction of new classrooms and dormitories.

The following years were a period of sustained growth for the school, the most significant development being the introduction of secondary classes at the beginning of 1963. Clarence was instrumental in gaining the necessary approvals for the higher classes and the funding for resources needed. Under the direction of Brother Finan Mahony, a basic science laboratory was built during 1963. Around this time, too, additional classrooms, woodwork room and dining room were also constructed. Meanwhile, Cornelius Keating applied his considerable expertise and experience to lifting the standards of the teacher training department, while at the same time assisting with the secondary English teaching. The size of the staff increased year by year, with the addition of Brothers Finan Mahony, Bede Maher, Alphonsus Laumanasa and John Paul Mauro.

One of Finan's students was Joseph Valei, who in 1974 had a son whom he named after Brother Finan. This mark of appreciation and respect for former teachers is quite common in Melanesia. Finan Valei, who has brothers named Clarence and Cornelius, later became a Marist Brother.
A Visit from the Assistant General and a Fishing Trip that Went Wrong

Brother Hilary Conroy visited the school several times when he was Provincial of the Sydney Province from 1953 to 1958. Elected to the General Administration in Rome in 1958, he continued his occasional visits as a General Councillor. Hilary was a keen fisherman, and, while at Rigu, he occasionally took the opportunity to try his luck. Brother John Paul Mauro tells the story of one such occasion in about 1963:

Hilary had already been fishing with some of the Brothers but returned empty-handed. Being a keen fisherman, Hilary wanted to go again. This time he wanted to go deep-sea fishing at night. After the brothers warned him about sharks and he would not change his mind, I was asked to approach Baimbai who was assisting his wife Kaki to prepare the evening meal.

“Baimbai,” I called to get his attention. “How now?” He replied.

“Hilary wants to go out fishing again,” said I.

“And where are the fish you caught when you went out?” Baimbai asked with his joyful smile. In the same breath he asked, “Are you coming with us?”

“Yes, I'll be with you,” I said.

“Right, you have your tea first. I'll go up to my house on the lagoon and take the big canoe down in front of your house on the beach. I'll come and check and, when you are ready, we will go.”
About 7:30 PM we were in the canoe sitting according to the directions given by Baimbai - Captain Baimbai at the back of the canoe, Hilary in the middle and myself in the front. Smoothly, the canoe cut through the calm still waters, moving south with Pokpok Island on our left and Bougainville on our right. After 10 minutes Rigu was out of sight; after another 10 minutes the Captain gave a signal to stop. After Baimbai has taken his direction from Pokpok island and the mainland, he asked me to tell Brother to bait his hook. Baimbai gave him a knife and fish. I had my own bait and so did Baimbai. The canoe sat still on the calm water, as we were busy with our hooks and baits.

Hilary had cut bait of the size required and he was ready to drop his hook down on the opposite side of the out-rigger. As he dropped it, he must have put too much weight on that side. It all happened very quickly. The outrigger was raised above us, over us into the water, turning the canoe bottom-up. Luckily each of us held onto the canoe. A few things, like a knife, torch, some hooks and sinkers and fishing lines all floated away or sank to the bottom of the sea.

Thoughtfully, Baimbai said to me, “Make sure Brother is all right.” I asked Hilary. When he said he was all right, I asked him to hold onto the area where the outrigger is tied to the canoe. Baimbai decided to leave the canoe upside down, hold on by one hand and use the other hand and feet to move the canoe towards the shore. Fortunately, the tide was with us going into the bay. After swimming with the canoe for about half an hour, we reached the shore. Turning the canoe on its back, we emptied the water out. Baimbai asked me to ask Hilary if he was willing to try again. To my delight, Hilary decided to go back home. As we landed back at Rigu, Hilary warned us this story should be kept secret here at Rigu; it should not go out, especially to Rome. Otherwise, they will never let him come back to visit the missions.

He did come another time. When he was with us, someone brought in a large fish. Hilary, the Assistant General, was photographed holding the large fish, which someone else had caught. “Come, from now on, you shall catch people.”

The Life and Death of Brother Simeon

Simeon McKenzie, born in 1914, the son of a blacksmith, was a complex character. Respected by confreres, admired and feared by students, he was a larger-than-life figure in the early history of Rigu High School.

Michael Miringtoro, a Rigu ex-student from Panguna, tells the story of the retreat day organized by Simeon. It illustrates the disciplinary control he held. Strict silence was to be maintained by the students for the entire day, with talks, prayers and reflection time. Towards the end of the day, the boys were told to go to the chapel for a quiet reflection
time. All were seated in pious silence. Suddenly, a large gecko fell from the ceiling onto one of the boys, landing on his back. He jumped in panic, grabbed the offending gecko and threw it. Unfortunately, it landed on another student, who screamed, jumped up and ran out of the chapel. The disturbance caused general panic among the students, who had no idea what was going on. There was general commotion and all fled from the chapel, running away from the unknown danger. The noise alerted Simeon who came running from the Brothers' house to see what was happening. He found boys screaming and running in all directions. He shouted at the top of his voice, “Stop!” Instant silence was restored. “What is all that noise for? Why are you running around?” he shouted. No answer. The student who, in his panic, threw the gecko didn't own up that he had accidentally spoiled the reflection period. Later, among themselves, the boys discovered what had happened and had a good laugh about it. Simeon never learned the truth.

Brother John Paul Mauro recalls the following incident which occurred when he was a student in Simeon's English class at Rigu in 1952. The story illustrates the humanity of Simeon, his occasional lack of judgment, his compassion and his ability to repair relationships:

There were about twenty-five of us in the class, a mix of boys from all over Bougainville, ranging in age from thirteen to mid-twenties. Simeon walked into the class a few minutes late, slightly flustered. “Bloody generator stopped itself last night,” was his explanation for his late arrival. “Get out your Papuan Readers. This morning I want you to read a paragraph each, loudly, taking turns around the class.”

The first student moved to the front of the class and began. Although correcting a few words, Simeon was pleased with the effort and the boy sat down. The next reader was Joseph, a boy from Guava village near Panguna who, aged about twenty-four, was the eldest in the class. He came to the front, opened the reader, and paused. “Go on, Joseph,” encouraged Simeon. Not a good reader, Joseph stumbled over almost every word until, painfully, he reached the end of his paragraph without interruption from the teacher. Relieved, Joseph began to move back to his place. “Keep reading, Joseph,” instructed Simeon. Reluctantly, Joseph continued. On reaching the word “home”, he pronounced it “ome”. “It’s not ome, Joseph, it’s HOME. Say it again.” “Ome,” Joseph repeated.

Simeon raised his voice. “Home, home, home. Say it!” “Ome.”
Simeon was more insistent now. “Say HOME!” he demanded. Joseph, completely shamed and angry, slammed the book closed, dropped it to the floor and raised a clenched fist towards Simeon, who, reacting instantly, seized the threatening arm, and slowly pulled the boy outside the classroom. The rest of us sat in stunned silence, shocked that a student would raise a fist against a religious person, but feeling sorry that Joseph had been publicly shamed. Some time later the bell signalled the beginning of recess break, so, as Simeon had not returned, we filed out of the classroom. Then, seeing Joseph emerge from the Brothers’ house, we rushed to him. “What happened?” we asked expectantly.

“Brother took me into his house. He made me a cup of tea and we ate Arnott’s biscuits. We had a good talk. It’s okay now.”

Francis Aniona, an ex-student from 1958, recalls Simeon:

Once we were in the singing class with the whole school. Some boys misbehaved and the teacher walked out. Simeon stormed in. He was a strict man and he punished us. Simeon was very strict. He was in charge of Grade 7. As soon as he got into his class, you could hear bang, bang, bang, hitting the boys with his hand. You could see the marks of his palm on the boys. But he was good otherwise. He disciplined us very well. Most of the boys behaved well.

Physical punishment was common in schools at the time, but Simeon was harsher than most. The unusual thing about Simeon's punishments is that he would often be upset by his own short temper and apologised to the punished student straightway. Simeon pushed himself to the limit, probably to the detriment of his own health. He demanded a lot of himself and he expected a lot of others. One of his stepbrothers had been a priest, but had left the priesthood and given up the practice of his faith. This prompted Simeon to offer his missionary service to God as a prayer for his brother. Perhaps, because of this, he was reluctant to return to Australia, even when quite sick. Interestingly, his desire to die on Bougainville was fulfilled, in extraordinary circumstances, as Brother Clarence recalls:

At the end of 1961 we were all in Rabaul for our annual retreat. The specialist at the hospital there was an Australian and a Catholic. We got to know him quite well. He said to Brother Colman and myself, “Before you go back, bring all the Brothers over and we'll give you all a check, just to make sure all is OK.” So we did that and he gave us all a good examination. He asked Colman, “Who is the superior of Simeon? I must talk to him.” So I went in, and he told me, “Simeon is a sick man. He has a serious heart condition which is life
threatening. You've got to make him slow down.” Well, if you knew Simeon, asking him to slow down was just impossible! We returned to Bougainville. He used to play tennis; I'd watch him, half expecting a heart attack, you see. But he got through it. In June of 1962 Brother Donald, the Melbourne Provincial of the time, came out on visitation. Simeon was in the chapel. Donald went down with him to watch him work and to talk to him. He was fixing up an altar for the Founder's feast day, 6 June. The next thing, Simeon just stepped down, staggered back and sat down. So we got him up to bed. No doctors, by the way, in those days. We didn't have a doctor anywhere. The nearest doctor was Sister Mary Leo, way up at Tearouki. So we nursed him for two or three weeks. I had contacted the Provincial in Sydney, Brother Quentin, who advised us to send Simeon to Australia as soon as he was fit enough to travel. Simeon resisted, saying he was getting stronger and would recover at Rigu. Anyway, the medical people said he was fit enough to go to Australia, so, following Quentin's advice, we booked him on a flight on 15 June. The night before, I said to Finan, “You go with him as far as Lae.” Donald, who was by now up in Wewak, would pick him up there on the way through and bring him to Australia. I have always been grateful that I thought of that. I said to the steward on the plane, “Brother is not well. Have you got oxygen?” He said he had. We went into the plane with him, made sure he was all right. So Finan got in with him. The plane took off, circled and headed up the coast. Simeon immediately had an asthma attack. Typical Sim, he said to Finan, “George, fan me, you bugger.” Within minutes of takeoff, by which time the plane was just about over Rigu, Simeon had some kind of turn. The captain had radioed ahead to Wakunai, twenty minutes up the coast, for the manager's wife, who was a nurse, to attend him. She had an injection ready, but, when she examined him, she said, “He's gone.” So they sent someone across to Asitavi mission, for Father to come over, which he did. They anointed him, but he was dead by then. They offloaded all the passengers, leaving Simeon in his seat, Finan with him, and flew up to Buka. They radioed ahead. The bishop was there with a coffin to meet him. They took Simeon back to Tsiroge, to the mission headquarters. All night a vigil was maintained in the chapel with the body. Next morning they had the Mass, and he was buried there. It was fitting, in a way, because he died without leaving the island. I think it was what he wanted. Back at Rigu, Father Brosnahan came over to our house. He was a great friend of Simeon's and would do anything for the Brothers. I was sitting down having a cup of tea, getting ready for school. He put his hand on my shoulder. I looked up. He burst into tears. I said, “What's wrong?” He gave me the telegram from the Bishop. It read, “Brother Simeon died on flight to Buka. Please inform Provincial.”

Bougainvilleans are proud of the fact that Simeon's body lies in Bougainville ground. They are grateful for the magnificent contribution he made to education on their island. The last word on Simeon comes from his friend, Brother Martin (Elwyn) Connell, a former headmaster of Bishop Wade Secondary School, Tarlena:
He is one of our own. He died here. I regard him as my saint and patron here in Bougainville. On my return to the island in 2000 I was delighted to stand beside him again at Tsiroge. We got on well together at Tarlena.

**Brother Clarence Moves On**

The Church, in her wisdom, decrees that six years is the maximum appointment for the superior of a religious community. Clarence's term thus came to end in 1965. He asked the Provincial if he could remain with someone else in charge. “I won't be any trouble!” were his words. Although Clarence thrived on Bougainville and would willingly have stayed, the Provincial had other plans for him in Australia, where for many years he was one of the most experienced and respected educational leaders in the Sydney Province. In the 1990s, Clarence made a further contribution to the District of PNG/SI at the Marist Novitiate in Fiji where young novices from the District were training. He served as leader of the community there for some years. Clarence had brought Rigu from a small bush school of about one hundred students to a well-established school of almost three hundred. The buildings were improved and an attractive campus developed. Secondary classes were introduced and the students were performing well in public examinations. St Joseph's Rigu had become a leading school in the Territory of PNG, a reputation it would retain for the ensuing twenty-five years.
Brother Simeon McKenzie and students
Chapter 12

From the Marching Rule to the Bougainville Crisis: Cautionary Tales of Nationalist Movements

Another aspect of Melanesia's history which has intertwined with our District story since its beginning is the gradual development of nationalist movements. The fact that Melanesians have the right to run their own affairs has not always been recognized, and much suffering has resulted. There are signs of hope as the Melanesian people continue their efforts towards development and establishing their place in the community of nations.

Protecting Cultural Diversity

Melanesian People have been living in these islands for more than 50,000 years, and, until the colonial age, successfully developed their own ways of living with one another in their environment. Ten thousand years ago, Melanesians tended the world's first food gardens and later raised domesticated animals. The cultural diversity of these islands is widely known and has been studied extensively. The great wealth of different languages, cultures, plants and animals is well documented. For example, of the world's 6,000 languages, 1,100 (nearly one-fifth) are spoken in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. In terms of this diversity, Melanesia is the richest in the world. It is little wonder that Melanesians are proud of their home and desire to protect it for future generations. Importantly, Melanesians want to be in control of their own homeland.

During the past 200 years, Melanesians experienced, with many misgivings, the colonial era, during which, for the first time, they lost control of their own destiny. Papua New Guinea gained its independence from colonial rule in 1975 and the Solomons in 1978. Independence
brought a period of renewed pride and hope for a bright future. The
new nations of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands experienced
unprecedented unity, a new beginning and the exciting prospect of being
in control once more. In more recent times, foreign ownership of
businesses, the control of resources by multi-national corporations, huge
national debts and political corruption have whittled away the idealism
and dreams of those heady days.

Self-determination is an issue which has affected the Marist Brothers
and continues to do so. This story contains elements of pain and hope:
pain, because it involves past and present injustice based on race and
culture, and hope, because the future of these lands, to a great extent,
lies in Melanesian hands. Modern Melanesians wish to preserve their
culture yet desire to be part of the modern world. They are aware that
no culture is perfect and that their culture must evolve if it is to stay
alive. By necessity, this involves new ways of interacting with non-
Melanesian nations and peoples. This chapter summarises the
development of some nationalist movements in Solomon Islands and
Bougainville, and the meeting of Melanesian and European cultures
within the Marist Brothers' Congregation.

**Millennium Movements**

Millennium movements, which have been prevalent in Melanesia at
various times, frequently receive much attention from western observers,
yet they are generally not well understood. The term “cargo cult”, which
has acquired negative overtones, is often applied to Millennium
Movements as they occur in the Pacific. This term is often unhelpful,
because it has contributed to a simplistic understanding of these complex
phenomena. Ennio Mantovani, former Director of Melanesian Institute,
believes that the term “cargo” is a western misinterpretation of the
profound Melanesian longing for full life.

These essentially religious movements arise as a result of the interaction
between traditional Melanesian religion and western culture. The beliefs
of the Movements are deeply rooted in Melanesian religion. The main
aspects of those beliefs are a search for a true Melanesian identity, an
expectation of return of ancestors, a belief that salvation will occur in the present world, and a belief in the need for correct rituals to bring about salvation. The aim is to restore the perfection of the ancestral past in the present time. (cf. Brian Schwarz).

The Movements are sometimes connected with social or political agenda, and some have been linked with nationalist aspirations. However, the Movements are not simply a response to the oppression of colonial rule; rather, they arise from deeply felt religious needs.

The arrival of missionaries had the unexpected result of the rise of the Millennium Movements. One factor was that the missionaries and colonials seemed to have an abundant supply of all kinds of goods, which arrived by ship or plane. The Second World War demonstrated that “cargo” could readily be delivered in abundance.

A particularly successful Millennium prophet was Yali, of the Madang District, who was at the peak of his influence in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1972, Yali befriended the American scholar, Jared Diamond. They had many discussions. One day, while walking along the Madang beach, Yali asked Jared Diamond a question, “Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?” Years later, Diamond wrote a book
which attempted to answer Yali’s question. Diamond presents a case to show that Melanesians are more intelligent, on average, than Europeans. Yet it is evident that European cultures are more developed. He points to the ready access that Europeans had to a wide range of raw materials, iron for example, and useful animals such as horses. This gave them an enormous historical advantage over the people of the Pacific.

Millennium Movements continued into the twenty-first century, affecting even the Church and Religious Life. Religious Life can appear attractive because of the options it opens up for its members. For Religious Orders working in Melanesia, wise discernment is required, both in assessing their candidates and in reviewing the lifestyle of all members in the context of the area in which they work.

The “Marching Rule” Movement in the Solomons

After the Second World War, the “Marching Rule”, a complex nationalist/millennium movement of Solomon Islanders, became strong on the Island of Malaita, which has a high proportion of Catholics. The English word “Marching” sounds something like a word in one of the Malaitan languages which means “Brotherhood”. The name “Marching Rule” therefore can be interpreted to mean a Brotherhood of Solomon Islanders. Partly due to their experiences in World War Two, Solomon Islanders were developing a new sense of themselves as a people who owned these islands and they began to question and resist British rule. The basic idea behind the “Marching Rule” was to improve the lives of Solomon Islanders and to promote Melanesian values. It had elements of cargo cult and much anti-British sentiment, as a reaction against the inequality between Europeans and locals. Naturally, the British authorities worked hard to stamp out the movement, but it continued in various forms into the 1950s, and the thinking behind the movement continued to some extent into the twenty-first century. Our Solomon Brothers, particularly Malaitans, were supportive of the more noble aims of the movement, as indeed were most of the Catholics on Malaita. (Many Catholics distrusted the British regime, which was essentially Anglican!)
The development of the “Marching Rule” had little impact on the daily operation of the Marist Brothers' school and there are scarcely any references to the movement in the Brothers' writing of the time. However, the Tenaru annals of 30 August 1947 record an apparently successful attempt by the British in arresting some of the Malaitan Leaders of the movement:

A British cruiser with several small craft with armed police boys proceeded to Malu in North Malaita to arrest the leaders of the Marching Rule. The U.S. supplied air cover. The British authorities announced that the raid was successful.

The Brothers of the time, none of whom were locals, tended towards the prevailing British view that the movement was a politically oriented cult which had to be suppressed, while encouraging the increase in Catholic converts which accompanied the growth of the movement. Like most expatriates, the Brothers had limited understanding of the complex issues that gave rise to the Marching Rule. One insensitive missionary at the time wrote, “It is an ill-advised movement, with much that is bewildering, the growing pains of a primitive people.” (Quoted in Whiteman, p. 272) Later the return of the first Solomon Brothers from Australia and the establishment of communities which included Melanesian Brothers expanded the Marist Brothers' understanding of local issues beyond the confines of their school. It is clear that some if not all of the Solomon Brothers were influenced by the positive aspects of the Marching Rule's philosophy of promoting Solomon Islands' identity. One of the Solomon Brothers wrote in 1958, expressing his concerns about unfair treatment of his people by the Europeans who came to the Solomons for their own financial gain. Given the activities and attitudes of some planters, timber getters and foreign traders on his island at the time, his strong language, a reflection of the Marching Rule anti-European sentiment, is understandable:

The white people who come to the Solomons are only after money. They do not pay us properly when we work for them. They take our land and they treat us like pigs and dogs. Because we are not educated, they take advantage of us. We work for them and they live just like kings. Now I do not want any white man with us. It is very good if we of the Solomons drive them all out back to
their own land. The only whites I want to stay in the Solomons are the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters.

This letter reflects a common experience of expatriate missionaries, who are generally welcomed by Melanesians if they respect local customs and assist by providing essential services such as education, health care or Church work. The Marching Rule adherents reacted differently to different missionaries. In general, Anglican and Catholic missions were able to continue their work largely unaffected by the growing movement. By contrast, many evangelical missionaries (notably SSEM) found themselves ostracized by their former converts, many of whom became leaders of the Marching Rule. The reason for the different treatment is that the evangelical missionaries were generally less sympathetic to traditional Melanesian cultural values.

The Marching Rule had lots of problems but it had many good aspects. It represented the rising self-awareness of the Solomon Islanders as Melanesians, and it was one element of a groundswell which would eventually lead to independence.

Recent ethnic tensions in Solomon Islands (1999-2001) cannot be attributed directly to the history of colonialism. The conflicts between Malaitans and Guadalcanals were about perceived Malaitan control of business and land on Guadalcanal Island, particularly in and around the capital Honiara. It was, however, the post-war colonial powers (Americans and Australians) who established the new capital on Guadalcanal, a decision that put into motion a series of migrations towards Honiara. These migrations ultimately led to the tensions.

Meanwhile in Bougainville, other events were occurring which contributed to a strong separatist movement on the island. The following sections outline some of the history of the interactions of Bougainvillians with colonial cultures. These events provide the background against which the separatist movement developed, strengthened, and ultimately became one of the factors which contributed to the Bougainville Crisis (1989-1988).
Blackbirding in Bougainville

Douglas Oliver, in *Black Islanders*, tells the story of a blackbirding party which, in 1871, captured a group of eighty-five unsuspecting Bougainvilleans who had taken their twenty-man canoes to the blackbirding ship out of curiosity or a desire to trade. The blackbirders enticed them on board and immediately chained them. Imprisoned below decks with another eighty Vanuatuans and Solomon Islanders, the Bougainvilleans, desperate to regain their freedom, began to rip the ship apart and set fire to it. Regrettably, the incident ended with the shooting of about seventy of the Bougainvilleans. The blackbirding captain, unwilling to risk further incidents with these fiercely independent people, instructed his men to throw the remaining Bougainvilleans overboard. Some jumped into the ocean and made it safely back to shore.

“Blackbirds Tamed”
from *Illustrated Monthly Herald*, 1872
This story is an interesting illustration of Bougainvilleans' desire for freedom and independence. After PNG independence, successive national Governments discovered to their chagrin that the Bougainvillean aspiration for autonomy was strong.

**The German Era 1884 – 1914**

In 1884 the German Government annexed North-Eastern New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago (New Britain and New Ireland). The Germans' purposes were to exploit a new source of raw materials and to secure a strategic outpost in Germany's empire. The German copra plantations on Bougainville used local workers under a basically unjust system of indentured labour. Local production of copra by Bougainvilleans was permitted, but a head tax was imposed, and all males were forced to do unpaid work several weeks each year on public projects for the Government, mostly on Government plantations, Government stations and roads.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War I, Australian authorities imposed a military occupation on Bougainville, although German planters were permitted to continue on the island after taking an oath of neutrality. Following the blackbirders, the German planters did little to restore the Bougainvilleans' trust in Europeans.

**Bougainville Between the Two World Wars**

After World War I, Australian Administration officers were appointed - *kiaps*, whose responsibilities were wide-ranging. They were “little kings” in their own area, with the full force of colonial authority. Locals were required to act as porters (carriers) for European travellers, a particularly despised requirement, as was the forced road construction work. The kiap often told the locals to improve their walking trails to suit his own travel by bicycle. As well, the German practice of the head tax was continued. During this period, many Europeans (mostly Australians) claimed “ownership” of prime fertile plantation land, with good access to seaports. The total area of foreign-“owned” plantations was 28,000 hectares (280 sq. kilometres), a significant fraction of the
small island's limited land suitable for plantations. As a result, most of the island's copra production came from European-owned plantations. The system of indentured labour continued, and Chinese or Europeans owned virtually all trade stores (retail shops).

**Bougainville in World War II**

The war story, as it relates to Marist work in Bougainville, is told elsewhere in this book.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941, their intention to occupy the entire Pacific became obvious. Consequently most Europeans, except those involved in essential Government administration, left Bougainville soon after the Pearl Harbour bombing. A month later, in January 1942, the Government District Officer, his staff and other senior Government officials commandeered a mission boat and withdrew to safety in Port Moresby. Bougainvilleans have since been somewhat cynical of that abandonment by their Australian “protectors”.

The expected Japanese invasion occurred in March 1942, Buka being the first island occupied. At first, Japanese relationships with the Bukas were cordial and respectful. The Japanese, presenting themselves as liberators, established schools on Buka to teach Japanese language and customs. As the war progressed and Japanese supply lines were cut, the relationships with locals became more hostile as the soldiers made more and more demands for food and harshly punished anyone suspected of supporting the allies. By the time the US army established a beachhead with 14,000 men at Torokina in November 1943, there were an estimated 65,000 Japanese troops on Buka and Bougainville.

The American plan was to build an airfield as a launching pad for a further assault on Rabaul, the Japanese Pacific Headquarters, a large naval and air base which was supplying the Japanese Pacific war effort. A year later, Australian troops took over from the Americans. Almost half of the Japanese forces on Bougainville had died during 1944, the major cause being sickness and starvation. The Americans, once
established, used their bombers to neutralize enemy airfields on the island, further isolating the Japanese from their supply line. The US forces made no attempt to occupy the entire island, having achieved their objective of building a secure airfield for their bombers. It was a different story when the Australians arrived.

The Australians decided to re-capture Bougainville and rid it of all surviving Japanese forces, a foolish and costly decision, widely criticised at the time and since. There were doubts about the plan, even among the troops who knew the Japanese defeat was inevitable. War's end was imminent but would be decided elsewhere; thus Bougainville's re-capture was irrelevant to the Allied victory. Nevertheless, when called on to fight, the Australian troops did so dutifully and courageously, yet suffered many casualties at the hands of the desperate Japanese survivors, well established on the island. Predictably, the Japanese losses were enormous. Eight thousand Japanese were killed in the fighting and an estimated 9,000 died of disease. Five hundred Australians were killed and 1,500 wounded.

The unnecessary campaign continued until war's end, and only after the Japanese surrender in Rabaul in September 1945, did the remaining 23,000 Japanese troops on Bougainville surrender to the Australians. It is unclear why the military commanders chose a course of action that caused the death of so many people and further disruption and tragedy for the long-suffering Bougainvilleans. Perhaps they wanted glory for the Australian troops and the “honour” of defeating the Japanese.

**Effects of World War II on Bougainvilleans**

Though the exact number is unknown, many Bougainvilleans died or were injured as a direct result of the war. Add to that, the destruction of infrastructure, disruption to food production and to daily life. The wartime development of roads and airstrips had limited value for Bougainvilleans (except for the Marsden Matting airfield surface, and other useful war debris, scavenged for use in villages or gardens.) In consequence, Bougainvilleans became more suspicious of invading foreigners who brought with them nothing but trouble and tragedy:
blackbirders, planters, German, Australian and Japanese administrations, and an unnecessary war.

Largely as a result of the war, relationships between the emerging Pacific nations and their colonial masters were irrevocably changed, and, in Bougainville and elsewhere, the stage was set for the strong independence movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

The post-war administration in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea resumed in much the same way as it had operated previously. Two new laws came into force which revealed a slow change in some colonial attitudes: local people were allowed to operate businesses, and, in 1963, they were permitted to purchase alcohol.

**Hahalis Welfare Society**

The mid 1950s saw the beginning of the Hahalis Welfare Society on Buka Island. This story, too long to tell here, was a further example of people taking charge of their own affairs. (There are many writings about the Society, e.g. Albert Kiki, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, Melbourne 1968.) Later, the Society's ideals were considerably discredited by questionable moral practices promoted by its leaders, which led to strong opposition from the Catholic Church, by far the largest Christian denomination on Buka. In 1962 the Society leaders advised their followers to refuse to pay the Government tax which resulted in a bloody battle between approximately 1,000 Society members and a large contingent of police. The Marist Fathers' response was to organize development projects along the lines promoted by the Welfare Society. Timber milling, house-building projects, copra and cocoa plantations resulted from the Marist initiatives, sometimes assisted by overseas aid.

The refusal to pay the poll tax during Welfare Society times is another early example of Bougainvilleans' suspicion of authority based outside Bougainville.
The Panguna Copper Mine

Between 1972 and 1989, the Panguna mine operated in the Crown Prince Range of central Bougainville. The mine site is situated high in the Panguna mountains, twenty-six kilometres by road from the east coast.

Panguna Mine in 1988

The full story of the mine - its planning, operation, closure and its aftermath is beyond the scope of this book. It has been well documented, e.g. D. Oliver, *Black Islanders*.  

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Prospecting began in 1963 when Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd (CRA) was granted a prospecting licence by the colonial administration. Early discussions with the Panguna people informed them that there were valuable minerals under their land. Secondly, the CRA officials informed the Pangunas that the Colonial Administration owned those minerals, not the traditional Nasioi landowners. Of course, the local people totally rejected the British concept of Government ownership of subsurface minerals. Their most common response was anger at these foreigners trespassing on their land. Later the American Bishop Lemay supported the landowners in their ownership claim on subsurface minerals, citing U.S. land laws, and pointing out that “crown ownership” was a peculiarity of the British system and by no means universal.

With growing alarm, the people of Panguna watched with suspicion as survey pegs were placed and test drill samples removed. Soon after, active opposition began, with trees felled across the helicopter landing pad and “tambu” signs placed by the locals on the prospecting area. (Prospectors Keep Out!) This resulted in a concession payment of $2 per acre per year for the area to be prospected and mined. Most continued their opposition in spite of the meagre payment. Police were posted at the Panguna site to prevent further disruptions to the surveying.

Why were the Panguna people so strong in their opposition? The main reason seems to be that they distrusted Europeans until they showed themselves to be clearly aligned in support of Bougainvillean people and their rights, like most missionaries. Bougainvilleans remembered the blackbirders and the planters who claimed the best land, then employed locals at low wages. They remembered being abandoned by the Administration when the Japanese came. They remembered the poor treatment at the hand of the mostly unsympathetic “kiaps” and Administration officials. Now these people were going to dig up their land and steal their minerals! Few, if any, Bougainvilleans had any idea of the scale of the operation which was about to begin in their mountains. Some of the Marist priests became involved in the dispute and encouraged the people to be firm in standing up for their rights.
Mining commenced in 1972. By then a road had been constructed, snaking its way 1,000 metres up the steep sides of the Crown Prince Range, to link the mine with the port at Loloho on the east coast. Water for the mine (140 million litres per day!) was pumped eleven kilometres from the westerly flowing Jaba River up to the mine site. Power was supplied from the Loloho power station, twice the amount of electricity produced by all other power stations in New Guinea at that time.

The people whose villages were on the site of the mine were re-located. Westerners cannot fully understand the psychological effect of re-location because they do not have the Melanesian sense of land and place. Every Melanesian has a home, ples bilong mi. The location of that home never changes. Even if living in another province or country, a Panguna always had a place waiting, high in the Bougainville mountains. My land, my home, my people. It is of immense spiritual significance. That this holy ground (Mekamui in the Nasioi language) could become drowned by a smelly poisonous swamp, or disappear into a huge hole in the earth, was absolutely unthinkable. Yet that is exactly what happened.

The disposal of mine tailings, deposited into the Jaba River, became an environmental problem of mammoth proportions. During the mine's seventeen year lifetime, one billion tonnes (1,000,000,000) of tailings were disposed of in this way. A similar amount of waste was stockpiled in a valley adjacent to the mine. The valley slowly filled with solid mine waste, eventually covering the site of Dapera village, which was re-located to a higher position. The Jaba River immediately became polluted. It widened, silted up and became blocked in places. This caused flooding of adjacent parts, thus forming large areas of new, polluted swampland. All fish life in the river died and the normally pristine sparkling water took on a murky blue coloration. About 1,000 people in the Jaba Valley were re-located because their villages were eventually inundated by silt or swamp. Numerous others from nearby villages in the densely populated valley were affected, as they customarily used the river and its environs for hunting, fishing or recreational activities. Under pressure from locals and environmental groups, the company began construction of thirty-one kilometres of pipeline which would...
deposit tailings directly into the ocean, instead of spoiling the Jaba Valley en route. The pipeline was constructed but it never operated. It was almost complete when the Bougainville crisis intervened and mining operations ceased in May 1989.

Relocated villagers, and later, Jaba Valley residents, were compensated by the company. Eventually, in an attempt to pacify increasingly angry and aggressive landowners, payments became generous. Not only were house sites lost, but traditional gardening lands as well. The company solution was to build European style housing and to provide food (tinned food and rice). Perhaps some were happy at first, but the cultural change was too costly. The previously peaceful village life was replaced by a life lived in the shadow of the mine operations, with its never-ceasing noise. Hunting and gardening in the valley were severely affected.

The influx of thousands of construction and mine workers created further problems. Many of these were New Guineans from the Highlands or Sepik areas in distant New Guinea. Bougainvilleans, who usually have jet-black skin, resented the intrusion of the much lighter-skinned newcomers. Thus was born the offensive term “redskin”, referring to any person from another area of the Territory. There were many problems with these workers, not least because of amorous interaction with the local women.

Certainly Bougainvilleans gained employment and unprecedented education and training opportunities as a result of the mine. About thirty percent of the 10,000 strong BCL (Bougainville Copper Limited) workforce were Bougainvilleans. Pat Howley, in *Breaking Spears and Mending Hearts*, has documented the damaging impact of the mine on Bougainville culture. In brief, the old values of respect for culture and traditional authority were undermined by a new generation of wealthy mine workers who were seduced by the attraction of the expatriate lifestyle. The wants of the individual were placed before the community good – a recipe for disaster in Melanesian society.

There is no doubt that the mine contributed much to infrastructure development in Central Bougainville. The problem was a perceived
Unequal distribution of benefits. For example, while the expatriate population of the new mining town of Arawa had all the benefits of residents in a wealthy rural Australian town, most local people were unable to access those benefits. Similarly, while some Panguna and Jaba landowners were eventually compensated for the loss of their land, many other similarly affected people received nothing. Worst of all, the mine profits were going overseas, and the royalties were going to Port Moresby. Out of this complex mix of factors the Bougainville crisis began in 1989.

Some stories from the Bougainville Crisis have been told in other chapters of this book. For more detailed information about the crisis, refer to Oliver, *Black Islanders* or Howley, *Breaking Spears and Mending Hearts*. Similarly, the exciting story of the years leading up to independence in PNG and the Solomons is beyond our scope here.

**The Enlightened Twenty-First Century?**

The problems in the relationships between nationals and expatriates of the past century and a half are unfortunately still alive in the early years of the new century. This is illustrated by the following story.

In 2003, the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, made an extraordinary outburst in parliament against critical comments written by some high-profile expatriates in the Australian press about aspects of PNG government and culture. One expatriate had claimed that PNG was close to collapse; another said he would never raise his family in PNG. Both men were permanent residents; in fact one was a PNG citizen married to a local. The Australian media published the allegations and sensationalized them, often in a shallow manner, showing scant understanding of the nuances of PNG culture. Sir Michael Somare was furious about these media reports.

*The National* newspaper reported Sir Michael's comments as follows:

“I want the Privileges Committee to imprison and hang them,” Sir Michael told Parliament in March, recently published Hansard transcripts reveal. [Sir Michael
Somare told parliament: “Mr Speaker, if there was no citizenship law, I would be the first to deport these people tomorrow.

“This has given a very bad impression that members of parliament can't even speak their language [English], translate, and can't do things that they can do in Australia. [These comments suggest that] we can't even pilot the 767, be engineers or architects or scientists.”

(The National, June 10, 2003)

In 2003, after nearly thirty years of independence, expatriates still hold many of the key (highest paid) positions in PNG.

A related issue is foreign ownership, an issue beyond our scope, but contributing to the strained relationships between some nationals and some expatriate residents. For example, foreigners own and operate most of the major businesses in PNG and Solomons, and even many of the smaller “trade stores”. Filipinos and Chinese dominate ownership of the retail sector, while many multi-national mining and financial companies operating in the region are based in Australia and US. Many of the Asian retailing families have lived in the country for generations. Many Asians have married locals, are citizens, and contribute enormously to the development of the country. They are respected for that, yet there is still a suspicion among some nationals that something is wrong and that PNG and Solomon Islands still do not belong to Melanesians.

These issues are complex. Simplistic explanations of the causes, as well as simplistic solutions, are not helpful. Those who advocate return to an imagined idyllic past (before the foreigners arrived) are indulging in useless romantic nostalgia! The reality is that the modern world has become “globalised”. While many people deplore aspects of the growing injustices which result from this globalisation, particularly for developing nations, it is also true that Melanesians have the capacity to work within those structures, seeking to improve their situation, rather than standing back helplessly. The greatest need of all is for education for our young
people, so that tomorrow's leaders are not only informed but also highly principled.

In the early twenty-first century, most citizens of PNG and Solomon Islands continue living with their traditional economies, so the wider global problems of unequal opportunity do not directly affect their lives. That situation, however, is rapidly changing, and the need for “education unto justice” is greater than ever.

And What of the Marists?

This book documents the achievements of the cooperative efforts of Melanesian Marists and expatriate Marists. (The term “Marists” includes lay collaborators.) It is widely acknowledged that Melanesians are a welcoming people and desire to work in partnership with well-intentioned expatriates to promote development, to provide services, and to build a better country for their children. As mentioned earlier, the history of relationships with Europeans has elements of pain and celebration. The cause for celebration is that most missionaries (among many others), over their long history, have succeeded in establishing strong relationships with the Melanesian peoples. The missionary endeavour is a common search for truth and an effort to build a better life and society in partnership with the peoples of these lands. In earlier times the missionaries would not have described their work in that way, but, in so far as they were successful in those goals, they were respected and welcomed by the locals. Missionaries come as guests and work as equal partners. This is true more than ever in the twenty-first century.

While working at Mabiri (Central Bougainville), I knew a teacher at Arawa High School, a New Zealander who was a keen bird-watcher. From time to time he came to Mabiri with his expensive telescope and revelled in the diversity of bird life there.

He said to me one day, “It is such a pity that the Bougainville Crisis has blocked me from going up into the mountains to look for the bird species that don't come down to the coast. I would love to go up to Panguna, or over to Mt Bagana, the local active volcano. This No-Go Zone is
He was both surprised and envious when I told him that I had been to both places and that our boys had taken me up into their mountains many times. The difference was that Marists were well known and respected. Although I was a newcomer to Central Bougainville, the long history of wonderful relationships between Centrals and Marists meant that, given the right introductions and permissions and accompanied by the right people, I was, at that time, welcome in the No-Go Zone.

It is not something that we take for granted, and sometimes things have gone wrong with individual expatriate Brothers who have run into problems with relationships. All of us make cultural mistakes, but Melanesians readily forgive such mistakes if people's intentions are good. The difference between planters/miners and missionaries is that one group comes to make money, the other group comes to help the people; one comes to take, the other comes to give; one is viewed with suspicion, the other is (usually) warmly welcomed.

The Brothers of PNG and Solomon Islands face the issue of national leadership. In this book are the stories of successful national communities and ministries, operating without the presence of expatriates. With a growing number of national members, the Brothers are approaching the time when the District will become truly Melanesian, with Melanesian leadership. Their youthfulness means that not many are yet ready for such responsibilities, but the time is drawing closer. A Melanesian District Leader will do things differently, in the Melanesian way. In these societies, with their rapidly evolving Melanesian cultures adapting to being part of the world of the twenty-first century, the need for committed educators is just as great now as at any other time in history.
Chapter 13

The Rabaul Story

1950-1959

For ten years during the 1950s, the Marist Brothers operated a school in Rabaul, East New Britain. It is an interesting story, with a chaotic beginning and a rather sad ending. Nonetheless, the Brothers' presence in Rabaul and their work among the Chinese community seem to have borne fruit, if we can judge by the number of ex-students who have become fine leaders in the country and have for many years maintained loyal friendships with the Brothers, continuing to support their work. The Rabaul school never had a Melanesian staff member, nor any Melanesian students. Nonetheless, it is an interesting part of our history, and its story is worth telling.

What a decade it was! Post-war developments continued apace, across the world as well as in PNG and Solomons. New leaders emerged: de Gaulle, Khrushchev, Eisenhower and Castro. There was a new young queen in England, and a remarkable new man in the Vatican, Pope John XXIII, announced within months of his election that the Church would have a great renewal in the Second Vatican Council. Television and transistor radios appeared. The space age began when the Russians sent Sputnik One, a small satellite, into orbit around the globe. Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary were the first to reach the summit of the world's highest mountain. Elvis Presley stormed the world and rock and roll was born. The Americans dropped hydrogen bombs at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. In our part of the Marist World, Brother Godfrey then, later, Brother Colman, were leading the school at Tenaru in the Solomons, while at Kieta in Bougainville, Brother Borgia, followed by Brother Simeon, was at the helm. Brothers from the Province of Melbourne, Australia, sent two of their men to a school on Kairiru Island, near Wewak in PNG. Significantly, the first Melanesian men from PNG and Solomon Islands made their vows as Marist Brothers in 1956. At the beginning of the 1950s the Brothers' work began in Rabaul.
The War in Rabaul

The Second World War (1942-1945) had a devastating effect on Rabaul, where the Japanese had established their wartime headquarters. In January 1942 the Japanese forces over-ran the small Australian garrison in Rabaul and established a formidable army and navy base, an ideal strategic location for its headquarters, with an ample harbour and natural defences. It developed into the major supply base for the Japanese campaign in the western Pacific. It is said that, at the height of its operation, the Rabaul base had nearly 200,000 Japanese military personnel. The Allies, wishing to isolate Rabaul and cut off the Japanese supply lines, maintained a fierce aerial bombardment which lasted for the duration of the war. Japanese casualties were high, and also many of the local Tolai people became war victims. The Japanese imprisoned the missionaries in a concentration camp until the end of the war. Sixty-seven missionaries died in and around Rabaul, and most of the mission stations were destroyed in the bombing. Church life continued, however, through the work of the catechists, among them Blessed Peter To Rot.

The Japanese built some 500 km of wartime tunnels in the soft volcanic rock of the Rabaul hills
The Chinese School in Rabaul

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a big increase in the number of Chinese families migrating to the Pacific islands in search of a better life or trading opportunities. In 1914 Mr Aloysius Akun donated a building to the Catholic Church for the purpose of establishing a school for the Chinese community. He brought a Catholic teacher from China to run the school. In that way, St. Therese's Yang-Ching School was founded. It later became Sacred Heart School.

In January 1925 three Australian OLSH Sisters (Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart) arrived in Rabaul at the invitation of the parish priest, Father Madigan MSC, to take charge of the existing Chinese Catholic school. They were Sisters Immaculata Mazengarb, Adela McGrath and Placid Cahill. Two Chinese teachers assisted them. At that time there were ninety-one children in the school.

After the Japanese invasion in 1942 most of the Chinese community fled Rabaul, many going to nearby New Ireland. After hostilities ended,
they returned to Rabaul to find their homes and businesses totally destroyed. With enormous resilience and hard work, they began again. Slowly, they re-established themselves and contributed greatly to the rapid post-war reconstruction of Rabaul, which once again became a busy commercial centre. The Chinese became prominent in the business community. After the war, in 1946, the Sacred Heart School re-opened, with makeshift buildings and earth floor. By 1950 there were 400 students in the school, which was by then operating on two sites. “The students were wonderful to teach,” reported Sr. Kathleen Gaffy OLSH, who was a staff member in 1950. “There were never any discipline problems, and we taught everything in English.” The school, like the town, was developing rapidly, so the new Bishop of Rabaul, Bishop Scharmach MSC, decided to look for Chinese Brothers who could join the staff of Sacred Heart School and assist the OLSH sisters.

**The Brothers Flee China**

Meanwhile, in China, other dramatic events were occurring. Foreign Christian missionaries were expelled from China following the promulgation of the People's Republic in October 1949 under Mao Tse Tung. Some Chinese people approved of the communist revolution, seeing it as liberation from the interference of foreign powers under the so-called Unequal Treaties of the mid-nineteenth century. These treaties had resulted in the opening of Chinese ports to European traders, the loss of the island of Hong Kong to the British, and the granting of unlimited travel and residential access to foreigners. There was also a “religious toleration” clause in the treaties, which ensured that Christian missionaries would be free from interference from Chinese authorities. Among the Chinese people the treaties were widely resented as foreign intrusion and control of their affairs.

The Church failed to distance itself from the political and colonial intentions of the Europeans and was rather slow to create national leaders in its own ranks. Virtually all Bishops were Europeans, even though Christianity had first come to China some 1300 years before with the Nestorian missionaries in 635 A.D. (The story of the Church in China is a long and complex one.) The new Chinese rulers saw the Church as
“foreign devils”, part of the system of foreign interference in Chinese affairs. The Church was not Chinese and had to go, along with the European and American diplomats and traders. Some terrible persecutions followed, and many Chinese Christians suffered or died at the hands of the communists, including Brother Joche Albert Ly, who was publicly executed at Sichang in May 1951, together with twenty-four other prisoners.

Following the persecution of Christians in 1949 and during the 1950s, foreign missionaries and many Chinese religious and clergy fled the country. Among them were Marist Brothers, who escaped to Hong Kong and Singapore. Many national Chinese Brothers stayed in China. Some were imprisoned; others had to hide from the authorities, refugees in their own land. The Brothers lost contact with each and with the outside Marist world. From the 1980s onwards, they began to have tentative contact with each other, and with visiting Chinese Brothers from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. The suffering of our national Chinese Brothers is a great untold story.

Among the Brothers exiled from their own homeland because of the communists were Brother Jean Marie Peng Yu-lin, Brother Claudius Maria Shu, Brother Antonin Cheng Te-Chuan and Brother Marie Joseph Dong Ruoxing, who were to be the founders of the Marist Brothers community in Rabaul.

Jean Marie, the man who was to lead the Brothers community in Rabaul, was himself a Chinese war hero. Before and during the Second World War, Japanese forces had invaded and occupied vast areas of China. Relationships between the two countries had been tense for centuries, and, during the war, the Chinese hatred of the Japanese invaders was strong, intensified by war atrocities. Jean Marie became involved in a resistance movement against the invaders and he operated a secret radio in his school at Tsingtao. The Japanese discovered the radio and arrested Jean Marie. He claimed sole responsibility so that other school personnel could be released. Sentenced to death and imprisoned in a Japanese war prison, he was finally freed by a guerilla raid. In disguise, he made his way across China, some 1,500 kilometres, until he reached Chungking in Central China, where he settled into the Brothers’ community again.
Later, Jean Marie received a medal and certificate of recognition for his services to the Chinese nationalists.

Father Thomas Ormonde MSC, a priest at Rabaul after the war, requested the leader of the Brothers in the Province of China, Brother Ange, to provide some Chinese Brothers to teach at the Sacred Heart School, Rabaul. Ange visited Rabaul, met Bishop Scharmach and agreed to send four Chinese Brothers. Three would come from Hong Kong, while Brother Claudius would come from Singapore. The tragedy of the events in China had resulted in four Chinese Brothers becoming available to staff the school in Rabaul.

**Arrival in Rabaul**

There were about 3000 Chinese residents in Rabaul in 1950. At that time the Sacred Heart School was a co-educational primary school of about 400 students, most of whom were Chinese. Some Australian Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (O.L.S.H.), comprised the school staff prior to the arrival of the Brothers.

In March 1950 the three Brothers left Hong Kong, and traveled via Borneo to Darwin, Australia, where they met up with Claudius, who had arrived from Singapore. From there they flew to Cloncurry in Western Queensland, and finally to Townsville on the North Queensland coast, where they stayed for three days. While in Townsville, they met Mr Shepherd, a reporter with the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*. Mr Shepherd was fascinated by their story, and showed them around the city, including a visit to a zoo. “We there first met kangaroos and laughing jackasses,” Jean Marie wrote later in the Annals.

Mr Shepherd wrote an article for his newspaper about the Brothers' arrival, in which he said, “The Brothers may never again see their homeland or their families as they have elected to remain in Rabaul for many years, perhaps permanently.” It was not to be.

On Wednesday 7 April 1950 the Brothers arrived at Matupit Airfield in Rabaul after an overnight stopover in Lae. A large crowd of Chinese families, together with the priests and Sisters, greeted the Brothers.
The problem which was to contribute to the eventual return of the Brothers to their own Province became immediately obvious on their arrival. The people could not understand three of the Brothers. All except Claudius were Mandarin speakers, while the Rabaul Chinese families were mainly Cantonese speakers, a different Chinese language. In China, Cantonese is a minority language, but virtually all Chinese Rabaul residents were Cantonese. The Brothers were “well-educated men” as the Townsville newspaper reported, having some knowledge of Japanese, French, and limited English in addition to their native Mandarin. Their French was better than their English, and was, for a time, their main medium of communication in Rabaul. However, except for Claudius, they were not fluent enough in Cantonese to communicate with the people they had to come half way across the world to live and work with.

Apparently, Ange, in arranging this opening some months previously, had believed that the language barrier could be overcome through the Brothers' limited knowledge of English. Perhaps he expected his men to learn Cantonese, a daunting task. We do not know why Ange and his four Brothers did not foresee the implications of the language problem.
It seems that the Brothers' inability to speak Cantonese and especially English was both a surprise and a disappointment to the Rabaul Chinese community and especially to the mission authorities. The language issue was going to cause many problems, and would become one of the reasons for the ultimate departure of the Mandarin-speaking Brothers.

The Chinese community provided a guard of honour motorcade to the Rabaul Catholic Church. “There was a long line of cars,” reports Jean Marie. On arrival at the Church, they sang the Salve Regina and the Magnificat. There were speeches of welcome. Jean Marie addressed the people in Mandarin, while Claudius translated into Cantonese.

**Getting Started**

The Brothers were impressed by the magnificent harbour town of Rabaul, scenically located near a dormant volcano. The school was well-equipped, with a large hall and extensive playing fields. Beyond the playing fields the ground rose sharply to the jagged rim of the ancient volcano, of which the harbour is the crater. The school was destroyed in the 1994 eruption of nearby Mt Tavurvur. It was rebuilt afterwards, but the enrolment was small because most people had moved out of Rabaul town following the eruption.

Life was difficult for the Brothers. The early Annals give scant detail of their daily life and challenges. “We were busy every day at our new work in this strange country.” Strange indeed – having been forced to leave their previous responsible positions in China to be faced with a group of people they hoped to teach, but could not communicate with. Apparently the local Chinese community was kind to the Brothers, as there are occasional references to social outings, sporting events and small gifts from the people. The parish priest, Father White MSC, appointed himself as caretaker headmaster of the school, which perhaps added to the tension of the situation. The Brothers recorded no mention of the language-related difficulties they were experiencing in the school. We have only the perspective of the Diocesan authorities. In February 1951 the secretary of the Vicariate, Father Copas MSC, wrote to Brother Andrew, the Sydney Provincial:
The Chinese people are now, and will continue to be, the influential citizens of New Guinea. Realising this, His Lordship the Bishop welcomed from China what he thought would be qualified teaching Brothers who would be capable of imparting to the Chinese children a sound Christian education, thereby making the child of today an ardent and loyal Catholic of tomorrow. The Mission incurred heavy expenses in bringing the four Brothers by air from China. In addition, the Bishop gave the Brothers a generous allowance. You realize that the result of all this was very disappointing. Not one Brother was a qualified Cantonese teacher. Three could speak neither Cantonese nor English, and this, despite the fact that they were to be teachers in charge of a school where only English and Cantonese were taught and spoken. As a result, additional work was placed upon the Sisters, already overburdened, and the educational standard of the Catholic Chinese School was lowered.

It was painful for the Brothers. They were so far from what was familiar, and no longer had the enormous respect, esteem and admiration given to teachers in their homeland. What made it worse was that the disappointment of the priests was obvious. It is also possible that they suffered some disrespect from some Rabaul residents on the basis of their different language, culture or religion. The four Marists were good, generous men, caught in a no-win situation. Something had to be done. The Diocesan authorities appealed to the Sydney Provincial, Andrew Power, for advice and assistance.

The Sydney Province Sends Brothers

Andrew, in his typical fashion, responded quickly to the need. He asked Brother Simeon McKenzie, of the Kieta community, who was in Australia at the time for medical treatment, to visit the Rabaul community on his return journey to Kieta, and report back on the situation. Some weeks later in September 1950, Andrew himself, together with Brother Borgia (Kieta community), spent some days with the Rabaul Brothers to familiarize himself with the difficulties they were experiencing. He discovered that the Brother Director, Jean Marie, was quite sick. It seems that the traumas he had experienced in China were re-surfacing. He was experiencing severe emotional stress, as well as physical illness. The Brothers decided that Jean Marie, accompanied by Borgia, would fly to Sydney for immediate medical treatment.
Meanwhile, Andrew held intensive discussions with the Brothers, Bishop Scharmach and Father White. Having assessed the situation, Andrew did not waste time. He decided that he would send one of his Brothers to Rabaul immediately to assist the Chinese Brothers. In a cable to the Brothers in Solomon Islands, he appointed Brother Ervan McDonough, of the Tenaru community, to proceed at once to Rabaul, to support the work of the school. Ervan arrived in Rabaul on 3 October 1950. Later, Brother Jude Featherstone, who was on his way to Kieta, joined the community for a few weeks at the end of 1950.

The presence of the Australians was a temporary emergency arrangement until the arrival of the Chinese Provincial, Brother Ange, in December 1950, when negotiations began with the Diocesan authorities to appoint Ervan headmaster of the school for 1951. Ervan, however, had requested that the Brothers' conditions, particularly their accommodation arrangements, be improved. Since their arrival the Brothers had been assigned some rooms attached to the priest's house, the mission reluctant to provide new accommodation until a decision had been made about possible relocation of the town at a safe distance from the nearby active volcano.

Ervan returned to Australia in December 1950. Presumably with the blessing of his equally stubborn Provincial, Ervan refused to return to Rabaul until the accommodation issue and several others were resolved. Meanwhile, Marie Joseph, Claudius and Antonin struggled on alone. The Chinese Provincial, Brother Ange, visited his Brothers in Rabaul for a week in December, and then proceeded to Sydney for discussions with the Sydney Provincial.

**An Agreement is Reached**

Relationships with the MSC (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart) authorities in the early days of the school were difficult. Arranging the contract was not easy. The Australian Brothers had no experience of working in a large mission station. In his correspondence, the Sydney Provincial, Brother Andrew, compared the arrangements with what the Marists had in place in the Solomons, Bougainville, or even Australia.
The MSCs understandably did not like those kinds of comparisons. They urgently wanted a solution however, and were willing to compromise. The two Marist Provincials, Ange and Andrew, finally secured agreement with the MSCs on points they saw as essential:

- The Brothers would teach the boys and the Sisters would teach the girls
- The Brothers' accommodation would be separate from that of the priests
- Suitable financial arrangements were put in place, including an annual salary of two hundred and fifty pounds for each Brother

On 15 April 1951, having secured a contract acceptable to all parties, Ervan returned to Rabaul after his extended Christmas break and took on the leadership of the boys' section of Sacred Heart School. For quite some time, the communications between the Mandarin speaking Brothers and the Australian Brothers was in the French language, a necessity which was difficult for both groups.

Staff Changes

During 1951 there were several other staff changes. It was decided that Marie Joseph, the youngest Brother on the staff, should go to Sydney for some studies. Jean Marie, the first Director, returned to China from Sydney. As time went on, some problems arose with visa renewal for some of the Mandarin-speaking Brothers, to further add to their difficulties. Jude Featherstone, of the Kieta community, assisted at the school for some months while receiving medical treatment in Rabaul. Mid-year, Brother Philip Phillips arrived from Sydney as a new permanent staff member and began teaching Third and Fourth classes. Brother Myles Fox, another Australian, replaced Philip three years later.

Of the original contingent of the pioneering Chinese Brothers only two remained by 1952. Claudius, by all accounts a respected and effective teacher, continued on the staff until mid-1956, when he returned to China. Antonin continued to experience difficulties in language, and at one stage planned to go to Australia for further studies. That did not happen
and he returned to his Province at the end of 1953. Meanwhile, Brother Venard Dominic, a newly appointed young Chinese Brother, had already completed his matriculation studies in Australia and taught in a Sydney school for eighteen months, awaiting approval of his visa to proceed to Rabaul. This was finally arranged, and he joined the Rabaul community in 1954 where he stayed for three years. He was a successful teacher and a popular young Brother, and was finally transferred back to his Province, to Kuala Lumpur, towards the end of 1956. By then, the General Administration of the Institute had decided that the Rabaul establishment should more appropriately be part of the Sydney Province and the transfer of authority from the China Province to the Sydney Province became effective in 1954.
Jean-Marie returned to Hong Kong after leaving Australia. He died in Singapore in 1991. Claudius returned to Hong Kong and taught for many years in St Francis Xavier College until his death in 1963. Antonin left the Brothers some years after returning to Hong Kong. He later became a priest. He died in Taiwan.

Dominic with some students on an excursion to the Matupit Volcano (Mt Tavurvur) in June 1955. They are standing in the crater of the volcano which erupted and destroyed Rabaul in 1994. In the local Kuanua language of the Tolai people, this place is known as Rabalanakaia, which means, “the mouth of the spirit”.

The School Comes of Age

There were many problems in 1950 and 1951, the main ones being the language difficulty, suitable formation for the young Brothers, strained relationships with the priests, accommodating to a bi-cultural community, all in the context of the complex multi-cultural mix of the Rabaul Church and society. By 1953 the Brothers had solved the big problems and learned to work with the remaining difficulties. Their little school began to flourish.

The Annals and school reports of the following years tell the story of a thriving school, with a balanced curriculum, active sports programme
and involvement in the wider community. The parents were actively involved in the school, supported it well and greatly appreciated the quality of education provided for their sons. In 1958 the school was registered with the Department of Education and had the benefit of greater Government assistance with textbooks and materials. Gervase Shekleton joined the staff in 1955. Ervan had made a great contribution in establishing the boys' section of the school from 1951 to 1956. He successfully negotiated with Australian authorities and schools for quite a number of students to continue their education in Australia. The families appreciated his efforts in this regard. 1957 Brother Vincent Flanagan became the new Director, with Brother Berchmans Murray as an additional staff member.

Vincent Shekleton (Gervase) surveys Rabaul after destruction by the 1994 eruption

There were always strong links between the Rabaul and Rigu Marist communities. Rabaul was a convenient stopover point for Brothers traveling to and from Bougainville. Bishop Wade SM frequently stayed with the Brothers in Rabaul which was always a great encouragement for the Brothers.

Vincent Flanagan was a popular headmaster. Among his many interests was Rugby League, in which he excelled. He coached a team in the local Rabaul competition and was selected to be the coach of the victorious New Britain team which competed in Madang in June 1959.
Significant visitors were Melbourne Province Brothers Baptist Faulkner and Canute Sheehan who stayed two days with the Brothers in February 1959, on their way to open a new community on Kairiru Island near Wewak.

A Sudden End

The Brothers' stay in Rabaul ended suddenly. On 24 September 1959 the parish priest, Father Dwyer MSC, called Vincent to his office and informed him that a decision had been taken to terminate the Brothers' work in the school. Vincent, who was enjoying the work in Rabaul, and gaining satisfaction from running an excellent school, was devastated. But the decision was final.

Father Dwyer explained that the school population was small (about 90 boys). The recently opened Rabaul High School would cater for the Sacred Heart students who wished to continue their education in Rabaul; so earlier discussions about opening a Catholic High School were to be shelved. With the smaller numbers, it had been decided to re-combine the boys' and girls' schools. There were sufficient OLSH Sisters to staff the combined school, so the Brothers were “politely relieved of their duties”, as is recorded in the Annals. The decision would save the Diocese the three Brothers' stipends. Saving money was the main reason given for ending the Brothers' contracts.

Later, the new Sydney Provincial, Brother Quentin Duffy, was officially informed. With the decision final, there was little that could be done. The Provincial no doubt would have no problem in placing the three Brothers elsewhere, and, in any case, preferred to focus his Province's mission efforts on the Melanesian schools in Bougainville and Solomons. He did not fight the decision.

It was a different story with the Rabaul parents, who petitioned Bishop Scharmach with hundreds of signatures, asking for the Brothers to stay. It was not to be. Even though it was Father Dwyer who had made the decision, the Bishop concurred. There was an element of “blind obedience” to the pastors of the Church in the acceptance of Father
Dwyer's decision by the Chinese community. One Brother, a former Rabaul teacher, believes that the people “regretted the loss of the Brothers for a long time. This gave them wisdom enough to have more mature pastoral cooperation with their priests in later years.” Realistically, in 1959 there was little more the parents could do to keep their Brothers.

The Chinese community continued their requests for the return of the Brothers for some time. Brother Othmar Weldon, Provincial of Sydney Province in the late sixties, regularly received delegations from the Chinese community during his stopovers in Rabaul with ex-student Lawrie Chan.

Sacred Heart School, 1997, on the site of the former Marist Brothers Monastery

From left: Tom Chow, John Law, John Lau, Vincent Shekleton, Michael Chan (Note the building similarity in the Beatification photo with Bishop Wade on page 143. This photo was taken at almost the same location, 42 years later.)

The OLSH Sisters, who had always appreciated the Brothers' presence, were also disappointed to see the Brothers leave. “We were happy with the Brothers and worked well with them. We were very sorry when they were forced to go away.” (Sr. Kathleen Gaffy OLSH, former teacher at Sacred Heart School). The Sisters continued at the school until 1988.
On 25 October there was a grand farewell dinner in the school assembly hall. Over 600 people attended. Father Hoene MSC represented the Bishop. The parish priest, Father Dwyer, was absent in Australia. Many kind words were said, thanking the Brothers for their work over the previous ten years. Vincent responded, thanking the people for the kindness they had always shown to the Brothers.

The three Brothers departed for Australia soon after. Vincent did not return to PNG/SI. He became headmaster of several Australian schools and died in Sydney in 1982. Gervase (Vincent Shekleton) and Berchmans (Kevin Murray) spent many more years in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.
Chapter 14

The Foundation of Kairiru

1933-1959

Kairiru, a mountainous island in the Schouten Group, is clearly visible from the coastal town of Wewak, about eighteen kilometres distant. Mt Melangis, 940 metres, the highest point on the backbone range of the island, towers over the much lower Mushu Island to the south. Roughly oval-shaped, Kairiru is about fifteen kilometres long and six kilometres wide. In the mountains there is a large lake, the source of some of the island's bigger streams and the focus of many traditional legends and beliefs.

Kairiru Island (rear) as seen from the mainland side, with the lower Mushu Island in front of it.
Kairiru has a population of approximately five thousand, in about ten main coastal villages around the island. The island is quite rugged, with steep slopes rising to the mountains, small areas of gently sloping coastal plain, numerous permanent, fast-flowing streams, rocky headlands interspersed with sandy beaches and bays, and precipitous cliffs on the northern coast. Few people live far from the coast, there being only a few small hamlets at higher altitudes.

Similar to the entire Sepik region of PNG, Kairiru enjoys two main seasons named after the prevailing winds – the Taleo (North-West Monsoon) and the Rai (South-East Monsoon). The Taleo, from December to March, brings most of the island's 3500 mm annual rainfall. The Rai season is characterized by tropical storms.

A major earthquake (7.6 on the Richter scale) struck the island and surrounding areas on 9 September 2002 resulting in an uplift which raised the island by thirty centimetres in some parts. Four people died as a result of the quake and the tsunami which followed. Fish populations
around the island have increased since the earthquake, resulting in more commercial fishing in the area.

St Xavier's Colourful Beginning

From 1884 to 1914, Kairiru was part of German-controlled Wilmhelmsland, or German New Guinea. What became St Xavier's High School began as a small catechetical school at Marange near Boiken, thirty kilometres west of Wewak, in 1932. Tok Pisin was the language used for instruction. The German Divine Word Missionary (SVD), Father Andreas Mueller, who ran the school from 1933, found that his young charges too frequently drifted back to their villages. In an attempt to make such unscheduled home visits more difficult, he decided, in 1936, to move the school to Kairiru Island, where Bishop Loerks had set up his mission headquarters at what is now St John's, about three kilometres west of St Xavier's. Eight years earlier, in 1928, Bishop Loerks became the first Bishop of Central New Guinea (Wewak area, west of the Sepik River) after the Division of the East New Guinea Vicariate, centred on Alexishafen.

The mission purchased sixty acres (twenty-four hectares) of land on what is now the present site of St Xavier's. The property slopes gently from the foothills of the mountain to the ocean. The upper section belonged to the people of nearby Shem village, while the people of Shokailal village on Mushu owned the lower section, which was partly covered with a sago palm plantation.

Mueller, assisted by two Holy Spirit Sisters, conducted the school on Kairiru from 1936 until his work was fatefuly ended by the Japanese landing on Kairiru during the Second World War. Brother Patroclus Appeldorn, a versatile German SVD Brother, was Father Mueller's right-hand man, manager, builder, handyman, gardener, prefect of students, even artist and musician; his contribution to the mission was enormous.

The Japanese arrived on Kairiru just before Christmas in 1942. Soon after, they brought most of the Sepik missionaries to the island. At first the Japanese treated the missionaries well, but within months, Japanese
losses at sea increased because of the intelligence supplied by coast watchers hidden in the mountains behind Wewak. The Japanese, however, suspected the missionaries, most of whom were German, and arranged for their immediate deportation.

In March 1943, the Japanese destroyer Akikaze Maru arrived at Kairiru. The Bishop, his Priests, Brothers and Sisters were ordered aboard, and the Akikaze set sail for Rabaul. During that voyage, on 17 March 1943, the order was given to execute all the prisoners. One by one, the prisoners were blindfolded, suspended by rope above the stern of the ship, killed by a machine-gun burst, and their bodies dropped into the ocean. In the course of three hours that afternoon, thirty-nine missionaries from Central New Guinea, including Bishop Loerks and Father Mueller with twenty others, lost their lives. In all, more than one hundred and twenty SVD missionaries and Holy Spirit Sisters died in New Guinea as a direct result of the war.

As the war progressed, American bombs obliterated the Japanese base on Kairiru (St Xavier's and St John's), which incorporated regional headquarters, hospital and seaplane base. The war bombing spared only
one of Patroclus' buildings, which, although severely damaged, was repaired and later used by the Marist Brothers for many years.

The redoubtable Patroclus was not among the war casualties. By a stroke of luck, just before the Japanese invasion, he had left Kairiru for a Christmas break at Marienberg on the Sepik, where the SVD Brothers operated a large sawmill. He led a remarkable evacuation of fourteen Priests, Brothers and Sisters by means of an arduous three-week trek from the Sepik to Mount Hagen in the New Guinea Highlands. From there they were evacuated to Australia until the war ended. Patroclus was able to return to New Guinea, where he helped to re-build St Xavier's after its complete destruction by American bombing.

**Post-War Reconstruction**

Bishop Loerk's replacement was Leo Arkfeld, an American from Nebraska, who, as a young priest, volunteered to come to New Guinea when the war was at its height in 1943. From boyhood days, Father
Arkfeld had been fascinated by aviation and always wanted to be a pilot. His dream was realized when he arrived in New Guinea and was appointed parish priest of the large parish of Lae. He immediately realized the advantage of using mission planes to minister to the needs of his far-flung villages. Gaining his pilot's licence in 1948, he was appointed the same year as the new Bishop of Central New Guinea, where became known as “the flying Bishop”. One of his first decisions was to appoint Patroclus to Kairiru, where the ruins of St Xavier's were overgrown by jungle. The Bishop later appointed Father Frank Mihalic SVD to join Patroclus and resurrect the Catechist School.


With the assistance of Brother Joe Czubek SVD, Patroclus and his team of workers gradually re-built St Xavier's, which re-opened late in 1948. Within a year there were more than one hundred students, with Mihalic and Patroclus their teachers. Mihalic taught English, Mathematics and Catechism while Patroclus handled the practical subjects – workshop skills and agriculture. A favourite weekend activity was to scour the bush around the school for wartime relics and treasures. Useful items such as rolls of electric cable (several kilometres of it!), serviceable diesel motors, generators, electrical fittings, searchlights and drums of fuel were recovered, along with artillery and ammunition. Using the war materials, Patroclus set up a generator which provided the school with electric lighting long before that service became available in Wewak town.
This WW2 Bomb has been erected as a memorial at St Xavier's

A great benefactor of the school at that time was Agnes Yakok, who later became a teacher at Bowor village, three kilometres east of St Xavier's. A remarkable woman, Agnes was a great supporter of and a hard worker for the school over many years.

The relative isolation of the island and consequent communication difficulties were always a problem, but air transport proved to be a boon. Encouraged by the Flying Bishop, Mihalic, Patroclus and their helpers constructed an airstrip which ran from the beach uphill for about four hundred metres. It was officially opened in January 1950. Lined with colourful croton plants to mark its boundary, the neat airstrip became a landmark and an important facility for ready access to the mainland.

St John's seminary opened on Kairiru in 1952. Mihalic wanted the seminary located on St Xavier's campus, but the founding rector, African American SVD, Father Clarence Howard, had other ideas. St John's
Seminary was constructed three kilometres away at Bagaran, the site of the former Mission Headquarters. Among the seminary staff were Father Francis Swift and Father Ray Kalisz, who later became Bishop of Wewak. In December 1953, Mihalic was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and returned to the United States for treatment for eighteen months. A succession of SVD headmasters followed until the arrival of the Marist Brothers in 1959. Patroclus continued on at St Xavier's until 1954, and then worked in several other parishes around the Sepik. A gregarious character and popular wherever he went, Patroclus returned to Germany in his later years, where he died at the age of 94.

**Invitation to the Marist Brothers**

It is said that Agnes Yakok was dissatisfied with the frequent staff changes after Mihalic left and approached Bishop Arkfeld with a five pound note (a large amount of money in the 1950s), asking him to use the money to “buy” some teaching Brothers for the school. Whether that happened, and, if it did, whether the Bishop was influenced by Agnes' gesture, are uncertain. The Bishop had realized that if his mission schools were to meet the post-war Government requirements and thus become eligible for the new school subsidy, they would need support from fully qualified teachers. He began to seek out a teaching order, and during a visit to Australia, he made contact with the Marist Superiors requesting Brothers to staff St Xavier's, Kairiru. The Melbourne Province, since its inception in 1948, had been open to the idea of establishing a mission school, so they gave serious consideration to Bishop Arkfeld's invitation. The Provincial, Brother Damian Willis, visited the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in August 1957. Stopping over at Rabaul, he spent five days with the Marist community there, familiarizing himself with both the Sacred Heart School and the teacher training school conducted by the Christian Brothers at Vuvu. Damian's interest in Vuvu was prompted by Bishop Arkfeld's request for Kairiru to be developed into a teacher training college. On Damian's arrival in Wewak, Bishop Arkfeld welcomed him warmly and took him on a tour of the Diocese, culminating in a visit to Kairiru, where he saw St Xavier's, St John's and other parts of the island. Damian's journey was described
in the October 1959 edition of the Marist Brothers' Australian publication, *Marist Monthly*:

The place they are offering us is Kairiru, an island about eleven miles from Wewak. It is about eight miles long and six wide and is dominated by a mountain three thousand feet high. At the moment there is a native school on the island and also a seminary for native priests. The Fathers wish us to take over the school and develop it into a teacher training centre. All teaching is done in English. The island has a lot to recommend it. There is an abundance of fresh water, and food is plentiful. The scenery is very fine, the climate is not severe and mosquitoes give very little trouble. If there are sufficient Brothers willing to undertake the hard life of the missionary, the mission may be opened towards the end of 1958. Brother Damian will be pleased to hear from those interested. The Bishop visits most of his stations by plane.

Damian received many volunteers, in his words *all of them top-notchers*, from whom Brothers Baptist Faulkner and Canute Sheehan were selected to found the Marist Brothers' community on Kairiru. The two Brothers spent some months preparing for their mission. Their preparations included courses on Sepik culture and first-aid, a trip to Sydney to speak with Brother Borgia Conlon who had just returned from Bougainville, and the gathering together of a small cargo of goods to be used in the school. There were personal preparations as well, including being fitted for smart white suit coats, which, in spite of their light colour, were never actually worn on Kairiru, being quite unsuitable for the climate.

**Arrival**

In December 1958 the Brothers of the Melbourne Province, in a gathering at Assumption College Kilmore, farewelled the two intrepid missionaries. It was the first time that the Province sent missionaries to another country. Brother Baptist tells the story of a telegram he received from the Provincial, Brother Damian, requesting that the Brothers delay their departure for Kairiru until Damian had a chance to see them. Sadly, Damian, who had been ill, died rather suddenly in Adelaide on 31 December 1958 before he had the requested meeting. The two Brothers never discovered the purpose behind Damian's telegram. With no Provincial to consult, Baptist and Canute travelled as scheduled to Sydney, from where their ship, *M.V. Malekula*, carrying about twelve
passengers, departed on 19 January 1959. After a stopover in Port Moresby, the Malekula arrived in Rabaul on 2 February, where for two days the two Brothers stayed with the Rabaul community. They arrived in Wewak a few days later.

Canute remembers the welcome by Bishop Arkfeld and their enthusiasm to get to the island and begin work at the school:

I am not too sure who actually met us, but pretty soon we were shaking hands with the Bishop. Of course, true Marist Brothers, we wanted to get over to St Xavier's fast. We had come to start a school, then run a school, and that's our job, so we wanted to do it five minutes later. The Bishop was a lovely fellow. He told us, “No worries, wait for a day or two, get the feel of things.” We were chafing at the bit, you know. We came to start a school, so let's get cracking. Finally, he got fed up with our walking into his office and saying, “When are we going?”

Some days later, the Bishop himself flew the two Brothers to the island in the mission plane. Baptist recalls the flight:

The Bishop flew us across to Kairiru. The airstrip was just wide enough for two wheels, about ten feet wide. There was barely sufficient room to stop the plane. Later I saw pilots do a turn at the end of the strip as a way of stopping their plane. The Bishop himself was a most experienced pilot. He was able to put his plane down in places where we would not be willing to drive a horse and cart. One of the first things we did was to widen the strip at Kairiru. It wasn't possible to lengthen it, but we did widen it. “Ordinary precautions,” smiled the Bishop indicating the safety belts of the Cessna 180, as we boarded at airstrip at Wirui Mission Headquarters. Something of the thrill of an adventure into a new world overcame us as we banked over Wewak and headed towards the high mountainous island to be known as “our island”. The colour of the coral-studded waters was inspiring and ever changing. Mushu below us with its extensive coconut plantations and dotted with villages held our attention momentarily; but it was the 4,000 feet high volcanic island ahead on which our thoughts continually centred. How to put the plane down safely on a strip ten feet wide and a few hundred yards long was a problem to be resolved only by an experienced and expert pilot. Forty-three happy native boys in red laplaps clapped and smiled at us as the aircraft came to a halt. The same afternoon, 9 February 1959, we were teaching these boys, divided into two classes, and struggling with the names. [From St Ildephonsus College, New Norcia, Western Australia, 1962 Magazine]
Canute describes the arrival:

Anyway, we get out of the plane (mine was the first Marist foot on Kairiru) and stand there, like two monuments. There were about forty-four kids at that stage, standing there in awe as these great educationalists beamed back at them. Our coats weren't there, but we still had our long trousers and our famous topless shoes. Present also was the doctor, Father Liebert. I am pretty sure Father Kalisz and Father Swift had come over from St John's, three kilometres along the coast, at the seminary there. So there we were. At the airstrip the sago plantation was down near the beach. There was a dormitory nearby, but nothing else on that level except a row of bush toilets. The other buildings were up the slope.

These two men, different in so many ways, had arrived on Kairiru to form the first Marist Brothers' community on mainland New Guinea. They were to be an effective team as they began to develop a Marist school over the ensuing years.
Chapter 15

Into the Deep
Kairiru
1959-1967

It is uncertain who designed the Kairiru Badge (1959) or chose the motto “Duc in Altum” (Put out into the Deep – Luke 5:4). While the Latin language, minimal Kairiru symbolism and the western heraldic design of the badge may be elements that would be done differently today, the motto, “Put out into the Deep”, certainly captured the boldness and risk-taking which was essential for the two Marist pioneers as they began their work on Kairiru.
School Begins

It was not long before the forty-four students were divided into two classes, Brother Baptist Faulkner taking Standard Seven and Brother Canute Sheehan dividing his group into Standards Five and Six. The education system at the time went from Standard One to Standard Nine.

The two Brothers adopted a typical no-nonsense, business-like approach, launching into the deep right from the start. Canute describes a minor problem with punctuality:

The first few days’ school began well. It wasn't long before it rained. I had gone up for a bit of bread-and-butter. Midday. We had staggered through a few hours of the morning there. The boys went down to their kaukau or their sago. I went up to Baptist at the house up top, had a sandwich and it started to rain. But it didn't matter. School started in the afternoon. At that stage, we were still on a regular program, typical of Australian schools. So at half past one, school starts. I went down to the classroom in the rain, and nobody was there! The classroom was down on the first level coming up from the airstrip. No students, not a single one. I had rung the bell; it was a big gas bottle. No response. So I went down to the dormitory to find every boy in bed, hidden under a blanket or two. They were cold, even though it was only around 31 degrees. Still, everybody was hidden under blankets. I clapped, as I did each morning to get them out of bed. No movement. I wasn't sure what level of confrontation was appropriate at this stage, but there was school to go to. So I went around and dragged a blanket off one of the boys. I said, “Come on, the bell has gone, it's time for school.”

“Oh Brother, when it rains we always go to bed over here.” Apparently the standard practice up to that time, up to the arrival of the Marist Brothers, was that when it rained, everyone just went to bed. Anytime. It took us some little persuasion to get them to realise that school was at half past one - come rain, hail, snow, shine or what. Anyway, a little bit of friction developed over that. But, because we were new, fresh, and had all the wonders of education to dispense, that saved any confrontation.

The curriculum comprised English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science and Religious Education. In the absence of adequate or appropriate curriculum materials or guidance, the Brothers generally used the teaching methods and content they were familiar with in Australian schools. At first there were problems in communication, as the Brothers adapted to teaching in a new culture. Canute explains:
We used mainly the Australian style of teaching for quite a while. When we did run into difficulties through lack of verbal communication with the students, we had to develop techniques to encourage them to feed back to us some idea of how well we were going. I remember, after a month or so, I had the temerity to run a test. It proved to me that they had gained practically nothing at all. So I had to sit down and re-think a better approach to what I was trying to do. We had not really discussed or evaluated our work very much, as we should have done. So each of us was proceeding pretty blindly. On the strength of that test, I could see changes had to happen and I initiated a few of them. Things proceeded a bit better then. One interesting little point. After 18 months, in mid-1960, one student by the name of Pat Patau put his hand up and asked a question. That was a big break-through. It was the first ever question! Prior to that, they never questioned, never asked, never sought clarification, and we used to carry on, presuming they knew everything.

In spite of these early problems the students of that time comment on the fact that they enjoyed the well-organized lessons, respecting and appreciating the Brothers' efforts for their education and the care and attention they received. Michael Nanguromo from Yangoru, a student at St Xavier's from 1956 to 1962, comments:

Both the Brothers were kind to us; you would never hear them get angry. They would do everything to make us happy. There is no question about the value of the teaching they were giving us. They were like parents to us. They would make jokes. I remember one day we did poorly in Baptist's spelling test. He said, “You boys must be dreaming about the girls at Yarapos [the girls' school on the mainland].”

The food for the school was supplied partly from mission headquarters at Wirui in Wewak, and partly from villages on the island. The mission supplied mainly sago from its plantations on the Sepik, while taro was the staple food purchased from the Kairiru villages. Initially large sea-going canoes with sails were used to go around the island to collect food and even for transport to Wewak. On one occasion some boys took a student with a broken leg to Wewak at night in such a canoe. The trip took all night. The arrival of St Xavier's new vessel, Tau K, in 1973 was a major step forward in facilitating regular delivery of food supplies. When Brother Terry Kane arrived in 1963, he set up bigger school gardens to help feed the growing student population.
Teacher Trainees

Around 1961 a lay teacher, Mr Don Grant, joined the staff; later he became a priest in the Diocese of Wewak. In 1962 Canute began the teacher training section, which ran for just one year. He used one of the school's classrooms for his group of trainees. It was a busy year for Canute, as he alone managed two groups of trainee teachers - A Certificate group and the more advanced B Certificate group, a total of about twenty trainees. All facilities were shared with the school. Later the Bishop modified his original plan of locating the teacher training for boys at St Xavier's and for girls at Kunjingini on the mainland. The two institutions were merged at Kunjingini. Part of that plan was to advance St Xavier's to full High School status. Canute resumed teaching in the High School in 1963.

Canute recounts a story of one particular teacher trainee who often fell asleep in class. He was surprised when he found the reason:

I used to find that during my lectures, given my usual verve, activity and vigour, I could not stir him at all. His head was on the desk and he just stayed there. The other seventeen were bright eyed and following the lesson. So I decided to check on this. I checked out the health; he was quite fit. Later information proved that it certainly wasn't his health. Eventually, I had to pin him down. He himself told me, in a moment of honest communication, that in the evening, instead of reclining on the bed appointed to him in our dormitory at St Xavier's, he would head off down to the beach and swim across to Shokailal village on Mushu, a distance of about a kilometre. He went to the nearest point. The lady of his choice would have left the village and moved along the coast a bit. After some activity there, he would hit the surf, swim back, and get a reduced sleeping time in the night, so that in the morning he would spend most of the time catching up on his sleep during my famous lectures. He was a nice fellow. He did well later on.

Building Projects

In those early days the Brothers added to the buildings with more classrooms and dormitory extensions and also did some work in widening and improving the airstrip. Baptist, a practical man and particularly skilled in concreting work, designed the building projects and supervised their construction. Philip Numbos, from Kragur village on Kairiru, one
of Baptist's students in 1966, later returned to St Xavier's as a staff member and deputy headmaster. He recalls:

Brother Baptist was a specialist in practical work. We were picked especially to do the carpentry work. Baptist showed us how to do all the concreting, all the welding, all the roofing. He was our instructor. He got us to do the work. Every work period it was an assigned job for us. Baptist chose us because we were local boys and it was easy for us to collect materials from the local area. Baptist was an expert in concrete work. My skills today, my house, and everything else I have built, I learnt it in my school days from Baptist. I am proud to say this, because when I became a teacher, when I came back in 1973, I was able to tell my students and the teachers that this is what I did. I had built these buildings under Baptist's guidance.

Bernard Klei, a teacher at St Xavier's in 2003, and one of Baptist's students in 1965-66, also recalled with much appreciation the skills he learned from Baptist while they were constructing classrooms at the school. They needed gravel and sand for the concreting work. The
Kairiru gravel was unsuitable for building; so the mission boat *M.V. Morova* assisted by carrying loads of gravel from the mainland. At times the entire school population was used to carry the gravel from the boat to the building site, using as a container the large base of the sago palm frond, called a “pangal”.

The coastal reefs meant that the *Morova*, when fully loaded with gravel, could not get close enough to the shore to unload. Large rowing boats, each containing six forty-four gallon drums filled with gravel, came as close as possible to shore, but even then the students had to wade out “into the deep” to load their pangal with gravel. Canute describes the procedure:

> The captain winched six or eight of these forty-four gallon drums out of the hold into these boats at the side. We would pull these in with ropes over the reef. Actually we could get just to the edge of the reef. Then every boy in St Xavier's had a pangal or a bucket, or some large container. There were eight of us in the rowing boat, myself and seven or eight big boys from the school filling the pangals. We used large enamel bowls to scoop out the gravel from the drums and tip it into the pangal. There were boys on each side of the boat. As the boat got lighter, a couple of blokes would pull us closer in over the reef, so eventually, the boys had less distance to walk. The boys just walked back and forth, back and forth. Seven hours nonstop doing that. Skin was missing, knuckles were marred, and you went through several of those food dishes. They just broke up in scraping the gravel. I remember, the boys came out and stood there, holding their pangal on their head. The waves would come in over their heads. They weren't even up to the level of the boat. They were very high sides of these boats. The waves would actually go over the boy's head. He would hold his breath. The waves would go on. He would reappear. And we would keep on filling the pangal. Then he would turn around and walk back.

**A New Headmaster**

After only three years, St Xavier's had advanced to the point where the School Inspector, Mr V. Mooney, wrote in his report of 1961, “You have here one of the best schools in New Guinea.” It was a comment about which Baptist was justifiably proud. At the end of 1961 the first Marist headmaster, Baptist Faulkner, returned to Australia. He re-joined the St Xavier's staff for two years in 1965 and 1966 and was then appointed to Pakistan, where he was headmaster of St Mary's High...
School in Peshawar for the next six years. Brother Becket Ketterer became the new headmaster of St Xavier's in 1962. An Australian from a small town near Bendigo in Victoria, Becket had qualifications in technical drawing, metalwork, woodwork, mechanical engineering and agriculture. Like many Brothers of the time, he gained these qualifications by undertaking evening courses after a full day's teaching. Earlier in his career he had volunteered to work at a technical school in Nigeria for eight years. (In exchange, the British province sent to Melbourne Brother Wilfrid Harrison, whom the Australians affectionately named ‘Willie the Pom’.) Becket, forty-one years of age on arrival, was a committed educator, an old-style Marist whose methods were characterized by firm, fair, no-nonsense discipline and a demand for the highest standards. His ex-student, Phillip Numbos, recalls:

Becket had a lot of impact - in the way of discipline, in the way of excellence, in the way of moulding us young fellows. He was a model for us, in fact. He was tough, but fair. I remember one time I had my haircut. I had long hair so I decided to cut most of it short, but I left just a few strands very long. Becket took us out on the field that day to play soccer, while he supervised us from the veranda of the house. He spotted my hair and he said, “Who is this fellow with his hair cut very short but with one long piece?” He called me from the field and he said, “Go on, cut the bloody thing will you?” So I got it cut. His rules were tough. I remember one time in 1966 he called me into the office during the evening study at 7 p.m. That morning he had seen us up early before six o'clock, lighting a fire to cook the breakfast. He said, “I don't want you getting up early and cooking the food. When the bell goes at six, that is when the fire must be lit.” He caught up with the prefect. The prefect said, “It was Phillip's idea to do that that.” But actually it wasn't; it was the prefect who organized it. Becket believed the prefect and blamed me. I took it; I didn't like to blame the prefect. Becket said, “Listen, it is very easy for me to send you up the mountain and down the hill back home to your village and that is the end of you.” So we all knew that he was tough. His discipline was very high. As a student I felt he was tough. But as I went along in education, I picked up the value of his strictness. He wanted to make us into good people. I appreciated what he did. I think that, in later life, incidents like that meant something to me.

Brother Pat Howley tells the story of Becket's intervention in a situation of a boy getting sick from custom magic. (In Melanesian societies, people often consider that spirits or sorcerers can be the cause of serious illnesses, which can be overcome only by stronger magic.)
One Wewak student came over to Kairiru, and he went back for the holidays in the midyear. He did not come back at the start of the next term. So Becket sent a message on the radio saying, “Where is he?” The message came back, “He is in hospital.” Becket was in Wewak the following weekend and decided he would visit this student in the hospital. So he went to the market and bought half a dozen oranges for the boy. He went down to the hospital. All the relatives were sitting around the bed. The boy was dying. Becket went to the doctor, and said, “What happened? This boy was quite well when he left school just a few weeks ago.” The doctor said, “This is a custom sickness; somebody has made magic on him.” Becket said, “We’ll soon see about that.” So he went to the boy’s bed, and he called him, “Peter.” There was no movement. Of course, Becket could get terribly fierce. He said again, “Peter.” No movement. He said, “Listen to me! When I speak to you, you bloody well sit up and listen. Now, sit up!” The kid sat up. He fed him the oranges and he recovered. It was the turning point of the psychological moment, when he could have gone down or up. He was at that stage when he could have either lived or died. All the relatives sitting around the bed were not helping him to get any better.

An eminently practical man, Becket had firm ideas on the type of school he wanted, tight discipline, strong academic performance and solid buildings. He planned to have “permanent buildings, solidly made of concrete and cement blocks, with iron roofs and cement floors, built to suit the climate, functional rather than elegant.” A new residence for the Brothers was completed in 1965. A rather grand building for its time, it was a solidly built two-storey building. Although roughly finished, it was a comfortable house for the Brothers until accidentally destroyed by fire in 1982.
Arrival of Brother Terry Kane

Another arrival in 1962 was Terry Kane. One of a family of nine children from Warragul in country Victoria, Terry was always interested in practical things – machines, building, repairs. As a boy he never aspired to be a teacher, but he did signal his interest, at an early age, in joining the Marist Brothers. He recalls:

At age thirteen, I told the Provincial, Brother Andrew, I wanted to be a Marist Brother. But I didn't want to teach. Instead, I would do all the other jobs that the Brothers had to do from early morning till late at night. “We don't have Brothers who do that,” Andrew replied, “but you go to Mittagong and try out.”

Terry soon found that in the busy life of a Brother, he did achieve his former dreams of doing all the extra things that Brothers do, “but with the addition of full-time teaching!” With his generous nature and diverse skills, he was a natural choice for the mission at Kairiru. It was the beginning of a long-term commitment to the people of Kairiru and the Sepik, thirty-five years in all. Terry's preparedness to accept a new challenge with great tenacity was typical of many Marist pioneers.
With energy and enthusiasm, Terry launched himself into many projects at Kairiru. His diaries of the time, an excellent record of daily life in the early years at St Xavier's, catalogue the range of tasks that Terry accomplished: ploughing gardens, bulldozing fields, carrying bricks, concreting water channels, building dams, collecting food, repairing machinery, constructing buildings, carting sand and gravel, and many other tasks necessary to keep the school running smoothly. He still found time to be a full-time teacher. The long hours of demanding work were tempered with island-style relaxation: fishing on the reef, swimming in waterfalls, animated card nights with the priests at St John's, regular correspondence with home, writing his diary and reading a never-ending supply of novels. Phillip Numbos remembers Terry:

Terry was a good science teacher and a hard-working man. He worked like fury keeping the fields in good order, working night and day if necessary. After two o'clock we would start work in the afternoon; sometimes he continued working until about seven or eight o'clock at night. He had a tractor light and one at the back to make sure the plough was going right. He was a hard man. He didn't rest. Terry also did a lot of plumbing in the school, setting up the water supply - he and Canute. They both did a lot of work.

Terry never felt comfortable with the higher levels of science; he felt he was keeping just a few steps ahead of his students. However, like many before him, he found his own struggles to master the material helped him to be an effective teacher. He established a new science laboratory, stocked it with equipment, maintained detailed stock books for equipment held, and kept the laboratory clean and in good order. Predictably, he enjoyed the practical side of science teaching and thus became an excellent science educator. In later years, he was able to assist younger teachers at St Xavier's and other schools to develop their own science programmes. He told the story of the university student who came to study the geology of Kairiru. When walking upstream in the nearby river, the would-be geologist discovered a peculiar weathering pattern on the rocks, which were stained with an unfamiliar white deposit.
Extensive tests failed to identify the substance, or to explain the process of the unusual weathering of the river rocks. He brought the problem to Terry, who, on visiting the site, laughed, “My friend, you have found the place where our boys wash their clothes. You are looking at soap stains!”

The Swimming Pools

One interesting project undertaken by Brothers and boys between July 1963 and May 1964 was the construction of a twenty-metre swimming pool. Canute supervised the digging and sealing of the pool, while Terry directed the construction of a dam on the creek and a pipeline and water race which would feed the pool. It became something of a contest to see whether the water supply or the pool would be ready first. (Terry won!)

The plentiful water supply from the nearby stream meant that there would be a constant flow of fresh water into the pool, after the construction of
the dam and water race. Canute describes the simple method of dam construction:

To raise the level in the Creek we had 300 students, from St Xavier's, St Martin's and from all over the place. Each student had to carry ten rocks from the river to make this wall, supervised by Terry and me and the teachers. So we had 3000 rocks. We didn't use cement. We just threw the 3000 rocks in on a big slope which created quite a pool of water. It used to run through the rocks. But, after a couple of floods it was full of gravel. It was quite waterproof, water just flowed over the top and we ran it off there.

The Brothers used similar ingenuity to excavate the pit for the pool, graded in depth from the shallow end to the deep end. Canute arranged the eighty-eight boys in a rectangular grid, eight students by eleven students, to mark out the pool area. The tallest students were assigned to the “deep end”, the smallest boys to the “shallow end”. Canute reminisced about what happened next:

Right, here are your shovels, everybody dig a hole where you are. When you stand in it, it will be big enough so that your extended arms reach the sides of the hole, and it will be over your head. We could do these things in those times. Slave drivers, you might call it. These holes gradually appeared all over this huge rectangle. Of course, the problem was, if you waited until the guy next to you had finished, it was easier to dig into yours. Anyway, there was the hole, a nice big hole eventually, eleven boys with extended arms long, eight boys with extended arms wide, a huge hole in the ground.

Rocks and concrete formed the walls of the pool, while concrete floor slabs scavenged from derelict Japanese war huts formed the base. By 1 May 1964 all was ready and water began to fill the pool. After they repaired several leaks, the unofficial opening, an impromptu swimming carnival, occurred on 17 May. “Pool full [therefore no leaks], crystal clear, had a swim before lunch,” a delighted Terry recorded in his diary several days later.

In later years, while Pat Howley was headmaster, the teachers and students constructed an Olympic size swimming pool. By that time the school owned a tractor, which helped considerably in the excavation.
On one occasion, the local driver attempted a slope too steep for the tractor, which began to slip down the slope. As the driver leapt to safety, the tractor rolled, ending its spectacular slide upside down at the bottom of the future swimming pool. The lifting power of twenty or thirty students righted the tractor, a bent muffler and slightly twisted wheel being the only damage. The tractor resumed work on the excavations immediately. Such mishaps were “all in a day's work”. With the help of a brick mould, the teachers and students manufactured the 3,422 concrete bricks which formed the pool walls. To reinforce the brick walls, the students cut by hacksaw 180 two-metre lengths of Japanese railway line, part of the rail track the Japanese constructed between St John's and St Xavier's. The consumption of dozens of replacement blades annoyed the teacher in charge of the workshop, but the headmaster, Pat Howley, was unfazed. Only occasionally did Pat call a halt to the pool construction for the purpose of re-assigning the limited workforce to other pressing tasks around the school. The Brothers named this second pool, *Sakura*, a Japanese word meaning “Cherry Blossom” which was the emblem of the Japanese Division on Kairiru during World War Two. Japanese ex-servicemen visiting Kairiru made a generous donation towards the pool's construction cost. The new pool served the school for the following thirty years.

**Communications and Transport**

The isolation of Kairiru, which appealed to the school's founder Father Mueller, proved to be a formidable problem as the school grew. Later the authorities considered re-locating the school back to the mainland for that reason. When emergency transport was required at short notice (usually medical evacuations), the Brothers radioed Wirui mission headquarters for a plane. The first Brothers used a large canoe, later fitted with an outboard motor, for transport to Wewak. In 1962, St Xavier's acquired one of St John's four boats, *Astrolabe*, which the Brothers renamed *Marcellin*. It proved to be a real workhorse, ferrying building materials, collecting food from villages and stores from Wewak, towing a specially constructed pontoon when required for bigger loads. Terry became expert in its maintenance. At times *Marcellin* was used
for fishing and picnics. Brother Andrew Morellini tells the story of one outing which went wrong:

Brother Andrew Morellini and students on Marcellin 1965

One Sunday, all of us, Terry, Canute a couple of lay missioners plus myself decided to go for a boat outing to the mission station up the coast from Wom Point on the mainland. About half way across, somewhere well away from Mushu, the outboard motor shaft snapped. In those days, spare motors weren't carried. If a boat didn't return the same day, it was assumed the sea was too rough and that those in the boat over-nighted somewhere and would come the next day. Our problem was that the Marcellin was caught in a current that would take us past the western tip of Kairiru and perhaps we'd drift to somewhere in Asia. Only after a few days would a search be started. Aware of this frightening possibility, we took turns jumping into the sea and trying to swim the boat in the right direction. Then, as this was not working too well, we pulled up some of the flooring and seats of the boat and used these as paddles. We eventually did hit land very close to the western tip of the island. Two or three of us climbed a cliff and worked our way through thick jungle before finding a path which led to St. John's. Fr. Kalisz, later Bishop, laughed and laughed about all this and still does when I meet him.
Sports Trips, Scouts, Bush Camps

For some years St Xavier's and other schools from the Sepik region exchanged sporting visits with a Dutch School in Hollandia (now Jayapura), the capital of the former Dutch New Guinea. The last year of the exchange was 1962, as that was the year of the Indonesian takeover of Irian Jaya. Hollandia (Jayapura) is about 350 kilometres west of Kairiru, just over the border of what is now Indonesia. The sporting exchanges, occupying an entire week, occurred in Hollandia and Wewak in alternate years. The well-organised competitions included soccer, volleyball, softball, swimming, athletics and other sports. Canute made the trip to Hollandia in 1960, while Terry participated in the final trip in 1962. Apart from some seasickness on the twenty-four hour boat trip, Brothers and students enjoyed the Hollandia trips immensely.

On the suggestion of Father Liebert, Canute established a scouting group at St Xavier's. Most weekends Canute took a group overnight to the campsite he had established high on the mountain. They were relaxing times for the boys and for Canute, who admits that the scoutmaster learned more bush skills from his scouts than vice versa. Stories around the campfire at night were a feature of the camps.

From the earliest days of the school the different language groups established bush camps of their own where, in their free time, they could fish, hunt, cook their own food and, importantly, speak their own language. There were
several language groups within the school, as it drew students from all over the Sepik and beyond. The Brothers encouraged the boys in this activity, and, from time to time, promoted hygiene and tidiness by awarding prizes for the best-kept camps.

St Xavier's Community 1966: Brothers Pat, Canute, Becket, Terry, Baptist

**Kairiru Students in Australia**

In 1961, Brother Oliver Clarke, the headmaster of Champagnat College Wangaratta in Australia, offered two scholarships for St Xavier's students to complete their High School education at his school. Peter Waliawi and Damien Sarwabi were chosen. Both did reasonably well in Australia, while finding the change of culture and climate difficult. In the mid 1960s, four Kairiru students decided that they wanted to become Marist Brothers: Bernard Karandi Pai, Caspar Yaku Yaman, Linus Idiwal and Peter Airok. They too travelled south to Wangaratta, where Brother Majella Fitzpatrick was in charge of the Juniorate section of the school. The “Juniors” were those who intended to become Marists. They found it difficult at school, as their academic level required them to join a class of fourteen year-olds, though they themselves were in their
twenties. They found the Victorian climate bitterly cold. The four remained at school in Victoria for four years, and then returned to New Guinea. None went on to become a Marist Brother.

**Two New Arrivals Launch Into the Deep**

In mid 1964 Brother Andrew Morellini arrived to assist Becket, Canute and Terry. Enthusiastic and practical, the young Andrew was an asset to the school. Among other initiatives, he introduced the boys to Australian Rules football. Andrew left Kairiru in 1965 to return to Australia. In 1993, Andrew, who by then had reverted to his baptismal name, Peter, returned to the District of PNG/SI where he worked at Madang, then as principal of St Dominic's Rural Training Centre at Vanga Point in Solomon Islands from 1994 to 1997, and finally as District Secretary at Sixteen Mile, PNG until 2001. Pat Howley, who was to become headmaster in 1968, replaced Andrew at the beginning of 1966. Pat recalls how he was recruited and describes his first impressions of the community:

That was my first appointment to the district. Actually I had applied to go to the missions much earlier, but nobody had ever taken any notice. When Becket came down to Australia for a break at the end of 1965, he was pretty well exhausted and he came along to me and he said, “You've just got your B.A. and we need somebody with a bit of education up there. We've got plenty of blokes out there who can drive tractors and all the rest of it. We need someone who is an intellectual.” That was a big joke because I've never been an intellectual. So I arrived at St Xavier's. We had an interesting staff there. There was Becket, who was a real professional, but unqualified. We had Baptist, who was a great storyteller (to put it mildly), Canute, who was a live wire, and Terry Kane, who got things done. He was the tractor driver, the boat worker, and just about everything else. Terry had the idea that he never wanted to be a teacher. But there was no choice. That's the way we worked. We had about 200 students at that stage.

At the end of 1967 Becket, after six years of sterling service as St Xavier's second headmaster, returned to Australia. He re-joined St Xavier's staff for two years in the early 1970s. As headmaster, Becket had put St Xavier's on a sound footing in every way. He lifted the academic standards in the school, advanced the school to Grade Ten (high school) level, planned, designed and built functional, solid classrooms, dormitories, and the Brothers' house and strengthened the identity of
the school. He resisted the Catholic Education Secretary's intention of sending all St Xavier's graduates for teacher training, insisting on freedom of choice for the students. As he completed his term as headmaster, Becket wrote insightfully, comparing his African and Kairiru experiences:

What is the future of our students, educated men, in the developing country of New Guinea? New Guinea has not been exploited in the same way as African countries. There is no legacy of hatred here. New Guineans do not yet feel themselves as a nation, but that is growing. Their awareness and demands for consumer goods and equality are only beginning to be felt. The whole world is sympathetic to their yearnings. New Guineans have no over-population or land shortage problems; unlike other places, they control their own land, crops and lives. They stand a very good chance of becoming a unified country. Our educated lads will be playing a major part. Already, our graduates are finding their way into the public service, higher branches of learning and politics. We hope, in these positions, they will have an influence for good on the whole country.

Brother Becket Memorial Hall, 1978
Becket taught his final years at Griffith, NSW, Australia. After his death in 1977, St Xavier’s newly completed Assembly Hall was dedicated to his memory. Becket brought the school to an early maturity and established its reputation throughout the Sepik as a fine institution of learning. Baptist launched the school; Becket set it on a sure course. A new headmaster was about to take the helm.
Chapter 16

The Winds of Change
Kairiru
1968-1996

The times were a-changin'. Bob Dylan's timeless ballad, released in 1964, somehow captured the spirit of the period. As St Xavier's developed throughout the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s, the headmasters and staff grappled with unprecedented change. Although Kairiru remained somewhat remote and cut off from many of the developing communications of the time, the islanders found they were not only part of a Territory that was rapidly moving towards independence, but also part of a world full of hope and despair, an exciting yet threatening world that would inevitably affect their island paradise.

In 1962 U.S. President John Kennedy took a hard line against the Russians in Cuba, averting the missile crisis, but he himself was assassinated a year later. The Russians were the first to put a man in space, Yuri Gagarin, in 1961. President Kennedy undertook to have Americans on the moon before the end of the decade, a promise that was fulfilled in July 1969 when Neil Armstrong took “one small step for man” onto the lunar surface. In 1961 the Berlin Wall divided East from West, Capitalist from Communist, while in southern Germany, at the Munich Olympics eleven years later, terrorists stormed the Olympic Village, killing two Israeli athletes and taking others hostage. All hostages later died in what was the worst Olympic Games disaster in history. The photocopy machine, Polaroid cameras and the audio cassette were invented and, in the early seventies, the first home computer appeared. Nelson Mandela received his life sentence in 1964 and Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis in 1968. The Vietnam War raged throughout the Sixties, rapidly becoming unpopular as graphic television images went around the world. The Watergate scandal prompted President Nixon's resignation in 1974, while Australia's
Governor General Kerr dismissed Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in controversial circumstances in 1975. The Beatles ruled the pop world through much of the period, while in 1967, South African Dr Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first heart transplant surgery. Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands moved towards independence, the push coming both from within and from the United Nations.

In 1960 Solomon Islands' Legislative Council began, its first local legislative body, while in 1964 Australian authorities in the Territory of Papua New Guinea established a new Parliamentary Assembly, comprising sixty-four members, the majority of whom were locals. Simultaneously, all people over twenty-one gained the right to vote. The University of Papua New Guinea began in 1966 while, in the same year, a national census estimated the population at just over two million. In 1969 sensational international publicity highlighted the land problems of the mining company in Bougainville, with photos of the riot squad showing helmeted police with batons wrestling with landowner women who were trying to prevent developments at Loloho wharf. In 1971 the House of Assembly adopted the name of the new independent state, Papua New Guinea, and chose the national flag; independence followed on 16 September 1975. It was against this background that Brother Pat Howley became headmaster of St Xavier's High School, Kairiru Island, in January 1968.

**Brother Pat Howley**

Born at Chinkapook in rural Victoria, Australia in 1926, and growing up in the Great Depression, Pat Howley was one of eleven children. He joined the Marist Brothers during the Second World War, making his first vows at Mittagong, Australia, in 1946. Pat taught in Australian schools for almost twenty years, beginning as a primary teacher and moving into high school teaching in the mid 1950s. During the 1950s and 1960s he gained, by part-time study, his first degree, a Bachelor of Arts from Melbourne University. Shortly afterwards, Pat was invited to work at St Xavier's, Kairiru. Pat Howley was always a strong-willed, independent thinker, who followed his own dream, irrespective of what he saw as the misguided directives of religious Superiors or Government
authorities. As a young Brother he ran foul of several Provincials who could not cure him of what was a rigorously forbidden pastime for Brothers in the 1950s and 1960s – smoking. Pat was never a subservient follower of arbitrary religious rules, but was always a great team builder with a highly developed judgement of what was right and fair. Pat recalls one incident when he found it necessary to side-step one of Becket's policies:

Becket was a hard taskmaster. Occasionally, students would get homesick and they would run away. Becket had an absolutely unbreakable law that any student who left the property and ran away would never be allowed to come back. I remember, on one occasion, there was a student from the other end of the island who cleared out after Mass one Sunday. He said he was going home. He was a dashed good kid. As the matter of fact, later on he became the boss of the Agricultural Bank. Anyway, Canute said to me, “We'll go get him.” So off we went. We pounded down the path after him. As we passed through each village they said, “Yeah, he's already passed through here.” So we went on to the next village, right up the mountain, where we found him in his village. His mother said, “You go back to school with the Brothers. Don't you dare run away again.” So we took him back to school. We never told Becket about it. He was only a little kid, you know. He simply missed his mother and family. Once he settled down he was right.

Pat Howley's arrival at Kairiru was in many ways a turning point in his life, just as it was the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in the life of St Xavier's. Pat Howley had never been a headmaster during his nineteen years in Australian schools. He describes those years as a period of self-searching, of finding his feet as a person, as a Religious, as a leader. His arrival in the Territory of Papua New Guinea heralded the beginning of a new and fruitful period of ministry. Pat recalls his early life and its influence on his later work in Papua New Guinea:

I grew up during the years of the Depression. When the bank foreclosed on my dad and he lost his farm, our family was left with eleven kids, trying to make ends meet. We lived in a tin shed, just a single room. The older ones lived out in the shearing shed. It was primitive. And we were subsistence farmers. When I joined the Brothers, the time I spent teaching in Australia was a very difficult time for me and for the whole Melbourne Province. There were a lot of new schools opened in a short time-span and many Brothers were over-worked. I felt insecure and I wasn't happy with the way my life was going. When I arrived in Papua New Guinea, it was a completely new slate. I was determined to make the most of it. I came in with the idea of setting to work
and learning as much as I could about the culture and the way things went. I really fell in love with it. Here I was coming back to the subsistence farmers, just as it was when I was growing up. I found I liked the people because they were simple; I knew what they were like. It rang a bell in my own experience. During my first appointment to St Xavier's, I did not go back to Australia for the first five years. At the end of every year, I would jump on the local mission boat, and head up the Sepik River or jump on the truck and head out to the bush. I would just wander from one village or station to another for the rest of the holidays and walk back over the mountains to get home. It was fascinating. These were the people that I was learning to live with. They were my own people, insofar as they had the simple values of the subsistence farmer. They were real people. As a result, I have always felt comfortable here, with the grassroots and the subsistence farmers.

Brother Pat Howley with St Xavier's Board Chairman and future Prime Minister, Michael Somare

Pat had an entirely new community of Brothers as he began his headmastership. New arrivals were Brothers Kevin Hoare, Malcolm Hall and Leo Labonte, followed later by Brothers Max Middleton, Linus Meehan and William Borrell. The new headmaster at first assumed the policies and the somewhat authoritarian style of his predecessor, and
thus the school progressed well for the following three years. At the end of 1973 Pat was given eighteen months' leave for overseas renewal. During his absence, Brother Kevin Hoare was acting headmaster. Other arrivals in 1974 were Brothers Bryan Leak and Des Howard, who was later to become the second District Leader of the Brothers in PNG and Solomon Islands. Des remembers a further example of Pat's independent streak, his lack of subservience to distant authorities, and his pragmatic approach to a practical problem. The Marist Brothers had a long-standing custom of combining the roles of director of the Brothers' community and headmaster of the school. Pat, fully involved in his plans for the school, could see no reason for over-loading one man with many responsibilities. Des Howard continues the story:

When Pat returned to Kairiru after his overseas studies, he resumed the role of headmaster and I continued as deputy. At that time I was also sub-director of the community (the term used then). Pat decided he did not want to be the director of a community of seven, so he arranged for a ballot among the brethren to decide the new director. I was elected and Pat communicated the outcome to the Provincial. This caused some amusement among the Provincial Council at the time but they accepted the verdict.

Soon after, the rest of the Marist world caught up with Howley and the division of the two roles became the norm in larger schools. Meanwhile the number of local teachers and volunteers was also growing. The volunteers were sponsored by the Australian, British and U.S. overseas service schemes, the Catholic lay missionary organization, PALMS and a few volunteers arranged by Pat himself. Among the latter group was Chris Mahony, who joined the staff from Wirui headquarters in 1967.

**Transport Matters**

By 1972 the enrolment had grown to about 350 students, and the demand on the island villages for garden food became too great to manage. It was therefore necessary to go to the mainland villages to buy food. Brother Terry Kane spent a day a week purchasing food from villages along the highway, as far distant as Drekikir village and beyond, more than 100 km from Wewak, close to the border of Sandaun Province. In June 1974, driving back to Wewak in his three-ton Toyota Dyna truck fully laden with food, Terry met with an accident. Coming down a
steep hill towards the Nagam River, he encountered another truck. It was heading for him on the wrong side of the road. There was no way to escape a side-swipe collision, which tore off the driver's side door of Terry's vehicle. The impact caused multiple fractures to Terry's leg and hip. Passengers in the other vehicle also sustained fractures and other injuries. Terry was transferred to St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, where he remained for three months. After this serious injury and a long convalescence, Terry returned to Kairiru in 1977.

In December 1972 the Tau K arrived. The need for better transport to Wewak was pressing, particularly for collecting food for the growing population at St Xavier's. When the Brothers asked their schools in Australia to assist in purchasing a larger vessel, the response was generous. Brother Kevin Mackin, who was in Bendigo, Australia, organized a major fundraising event consisting of a walk across the State of Victoria from Wodonga on the Murray River in the North, across the mountains to Seaspray on the Gippsland coast, a distance of some three hundred kilometres. Supported mainly by the business houses of
Bendigo, the event raised approximately $2,000 for the *Tau K* project. Other schools contributed a further $10,000 and the Kairiru Brothers themselves were able to gather the equivalent of $2,000 Australian. The total cost of the vessel was $36,000 Australian, covered by a bank loan secured by the Marist Brothers' Province of Melbourne.

Built by De Havilland Marine in Sydney, the *Tau K* was an eminently suitable mission vessel. It was a five-tonne aluminium barge, eleven metres long, powered by two sturdy diesel motors, with a front-end ramp for ease of loading cargo. It was large enough to carry a vehicle, up to fifty passengers or the four tonnes of taro and kaukau required for food each week. The *Tau K* travelled to Kairiru by ship, after Brother Linus Meehan took it on several trial runs in Georges River near Sydney. On its arrival at Wewak, Brothers Terry and Linus were on board the *Tau K* as she was lowered by the ship's crane directly into Wewak Harbour. Pat Howley described the event:

Terry and Linus rode the *Tau K* down to the water with smiles like those of the cat that swallowed the canary. The maiden voyage across to Kairiru was a good try-out. There was a strong wind, with plenty of white horses about on the sea, but she rode it like a bird. I would not have been too keen to take the trip in our speedboat but in the *Tau K* there was no trouble. It certainly is the boat we need.

For the previous several months, Pat Howley, with many helpers, had dynamited a passage through the coastal reef adjacent to St Xavier's and with boulders, coral fragments and soil, they constructed a wharf for convenient berthing of the new vessel. Franze Kairiru, of Serasin village, about four kilometres east of St Xavier's, gave the boat its name. “Tau” was the traditional name for Kairiru, and Franze also wanted a “Catholic” name for the Catholic School's boat; so “K” was added, the first letter of Kristofa, the Tok Pisin spelling of the name of the saint who carried Christ over the water, the patron saint of travellers. The Brothers took passengers when space permitted, at twenty toea (about ten cents Australian) for the trip to Wewak. When Brother Kevin Hoare tried to increase the fare six years later, there was a small protest by some locals who demanded that, if the fare increased, then permission to use the customary name of *Tau K* would be withdrawn. That little
problem was solved amicably, but it is uncertain whether Kevin was able to extract the additional fare from the aggrieved passengers.

The *Tau K* gave the school excellent service for many years. Maintenance was always a problem, as parts were not locally available, but with the expertise and regular attention of Max Middleton, Linus Meehan, Terry Kane and, later, Paul Johnston, the sea-worthiness of the vessel was assured.

A transport problem of another kind occurred in 1972 when a small plane, the *Wings of Hope*, encountering changing winds too strong to handle, came to grief at the end of St Xavier's airstrip and ditched into the ocean. There were no injuries but the aircraft was a write-off. Max Middleton recalls the scene:

This little plane was a bit like an eggbeater with a motor-mower engine. It had a little nose wheel, while the other mission planes had tail wheels. The pilot wasn't a local; he was from Daru. He'd arrived safely in the morning, bringing some Government official. It was taleo [North West Monsoon] season and
there was a strong nor-westerly crosswind. When he was ready to leave in the afternoon it was sport time, so all the students had to clear the airstrip where they had been playing, so they just stood back and had a grandstand view of the whole incident. The little plane just wasn't powerful enough to beat the wind. It took off down the end of the strip, and he was committed to go. The wind kept blowing him off the narrow strip. When he took off, he didn't have enough power, so he put down, and tried again, but the plane wasn't heading straight down the strip, it was heading across. The little nose wheel was bouncing horribly because the edge of the strip was rough. He lifted the nose wheel early, and, when he did that, he got the crosswind and the plane just drifted off course. His left hand wheel hit a kwila stump, about five feet high. [Kwila is an ironwood; its timber is so heavy it does not float.] Somehow the collision also damaged his tail, so, even though he was airborne, he wasn't going anywhere. Moments later, it hit the water, just off the reef. Fortunately, the pilot and his passenger weren't hurt and evacuated safely. But the plane - it was unbelievable - it just sank within half a minute. It went down very quickly. Of course, all the students saw it. There were kids everywhere. The little kids poured out of the nearby Primary School and ran to the shore. I was on the motorbike, so I raced down there and swam out to where the plane had sunk. It was in about 15 feet of water, just off the reef. We dived down, tied it to the tractor, and hauled it to shore, all in bits and pieces. It was a write-off. When it hit the saltwater, that was it. We retrieved one of the fuel tanks and later used it for the boat.

The remains of *Wings of Hope* after the crash and the kwila stump that caused it

The problem of transporting people and supplies to and from the island was one of the issues prompting discussions about the possible re-location of St Xavier's to the mainland. Beginning in the 1960s, the debate re-surfaced from time to time over the following decades, especially in the 1980s, when Government education authorities
considered zoning the intake areas for the high schools in the Province, effectively reducing the enrolment intake for St Xavier's. Every time the question arose, the problems involved in re-locating the school proved insurmountable. St Xavier's remained on Kairiru.

**Different Kinds of Contributions**

In 1972, amid the hard work of teaching, building, gardening, collecting food, maintaining machinery and the dozens of other activities which occupied the Brothers' time, there arrived in their midst a quietly spoken academic, a native of Smyrna on the Eastern Mediterranean coast, at that time, part of Greece. Brother William Borrell had worked for some years in mainland China until evicted by the communists in 1952, then, after some time in the UK, he returned to the China Province, teaching in a number of countries, including Hong Kong. Except for a one-year break, he remained at St Xavier's until 1981. William had a particular skill in motivating the higher-ability students and thus achieved some excellent science results. Thus, quite a number of his ex-students completed tertiary studies and proceeded to scientific and other professional careers. His students were able to assist him in his study of the flora of the island, which was later published. The 250-page book, with its detailed annotations and superb botanical drawings, was hardly a best seller, but, nonetheless, was a significant contribution to Papua New Guinea's scientific literature. William wrote that he was “surprised by, and admired, the astounding and deep knowledge the Kairiru people possess of their flora.” After leaving Kairiru, William moved to Australia, where he continued his interest, study and writing on scientific topics.

Prior to joining the Brothers Max Middleton had worked in Western Australia, assisting aboriginal communities. He arrived in Kairiru at the beginning of 1970 and began teaching science, agriculture and practical skills. As time went on, Max became more involved in food transport and boat maintenance. In the mid-seventies he returned to Australia, completed his trade apprenticeship as a diesel mechanic, and later worked at Santa Teresa Mission in Central Australia for four years, where he was in charge of the workshop. After completing an electrical
trade apprenticeship, Max proceeded to Solomon Islands where he worked for ten years at St Dominic's Rural Training Centre at Vanga Point.

**The Kairiru Experiment**

In 1974 Pat Howley returned to Australia to complete Bachelor of Education studies at Monash University in Melbourne. Reflecting on his experiences at Kairiru in the light of these studies, Pat was ready to review the basic philosophy of education at St Xavier's. Ken Egan, a recent addition to the St Xavier's staff from Melbourne, Australia, also influenced Pat to implement radical changes in the school policies. In fact, he was a major player in developing the scheme, writing the discussion papers, and overseeing its implementation. The driving issue behind the changes was that, while the St Xavier's students excelled at school, there was evidence that, after leaving school, many of them dropped out of tertiary studies. “They were into wine, women and song and dipping into the bloody till,” explained Pat. Another factor was an initiative coming from the Department of Education of the newly independent PNG which urged schools to create education systems which were appropriate for PNG students, rather than continue with the imported Western education models then in use. And so began a series of discussions among the staff which culminated in the introduction in 1976 of a completely different approach to education, aimed at preparing students for life rather than for further study. The key strategies were to place much greater responsibility on the students themselves for their own performance and behaviour, and to change the nature of the relationships between staff and students in a radical way.

Pat and the staff initiated a school parliament system, with a number of committees covering every aspect of school life. Each committee had a staff member as animator, but the students retained real decision-making ability in virtually all areas, including disciplinary matters, school finances, food, transport, social activities, sports, school fees, trades store, gardens and machinery. There was even an ombudsman to whom all had recourse and to whom all, including the headmaster, had to answer when legitimate complaints were investigated. Night study became
optional, although quiet was required and no alternative activities could be scheduled during the quiet period. The students gradually learned that they had to be responsible for the consequences of their own decisions. The school's Board of Governors, in approving the scheme, insisted that the headmaster be given power of veto, an option which he never exercised. The staff introduced a course on human relations and personality development for all classes. Often the events of school life became matter for class discussion and debate.

On one occasion, the volunteer nurse was called out at night to assist with a young mother giving birth. The school tractor and trailer were used to transport the woman to the aid post, but, because the woman in question was unmarried, most students refused to assist, as this was not in line with local custom. Later, when the same trailer was used to transport food for the school's kitchen, many students refused to eat it, again because of traditional beliefs that the food would be contaminated. This issue became a matter for class discussion. Village elders were invited to participate in the debate which centred on the issue of the interplay of custom beliefs and Christian compassion. When other serious problems arose, it was not uncommon for the students concerned to “go bush” for a day to sort out the matter with an accompanying teacher. Solving problems in this way was time-consuming, but more appropriately Melanesian than the authoritarian methods of the past.

The system had its critics. The school inspector, Mr Neil Murray, in his report in May 1976, suggested that the scheme's implementation was “too much too quickly” and that students were “finding serious difficulty in adjusting to the sheer quantity of change”. Later, some of the staff, who could see both the inspector's and headmaster's differing viewpoints, decided to apply Pat's own methods of conflict resolution to the problem. They invited both Pat and the inspector to a mediated meeting at which the disagreement was openly discussed, with the staff sharing their views on the scheme. The happy outcomes were acceptance of the scheme by the inspector and the development of a firm friendship between Pat and Mr Murray. A further issue was that the number of students attending daily Mass, which became optional, began to dwindle, and this was a matter of concern to some of the priests at St John's, who were critical
of the change. Bishop Arkfeld, however, gave his full support to Pat and the staff. Even some staff found the changes difficult and occasionally reverted to authoritarian methods. When asked in 2002 to evaluate the Kairiru Experiment, Pat commented:

Knowing what I know now, I would tighten it up in a number of ways, while retaining the degree of freedom which they had, the freedom of choice. At that stage, I allowed students to be antisocial, in a way that I would not accept now. The biggest mistake that we made was that the students were not adequately confronted on being irresponsible; they were allowed to be irresponsible and get away with it. On the other hand, it produced students who were self-motivated, critical thinkers, who were confident and could speak up for themselves. So there were a couple of minuses and a couple of pluses.

The system remained in place for almost ten years. By the time Kevin Hoare became headmaster in 1986, the school had changed again, with an increased number of younger local staff who were less comfortable with an unstructured system, particularly the disciplinary process. Gradually, the plan was modified, and once again St Xavier's became a more “conventional” high school. When Pat was appointed as headmaster of Passam National High School in 1978, he introduced a similar experiment there.

Brother Herman Boyek and Brother Melchior Jalowa were students at Kairiru prior to the commencement of the St Xavier's experiment. They completed their novitiate at Lomeri, Fiji, and were professed as Marist Brothers in December 1973. Herman is a Kairiruan from Kragur village, on the north coast of the island. He reflects on his school experiences, his former headmaster and the influence of St Xavier's education:

Pat was always a bit independent. He wasn't very popular with the bishops or the priests in Wewak because he was always siding with the students. He wanted to develop the students' belief in themselves. That was Pat's contribution to St Xavier's, Passam National High and, later, Divine Word University. Pat taught what he believed in. He never simply followed the inspectors. I know ex-students who say that St Xavier's taught them to be assertive, and that has stood by them in their lives and in their careers. It was a valuable lesson.
Land Issues

As the school grew, relationships with the surrounding villages developed and changed. Some problems arose from time to time, particularly over land use and boundaries. Herman Boyek explains some of the issues involved:

Land is a very touchy point for Melanesians, Kairiruans especially. Traditional ownership of the school's land was always disputed. In PNG, mission land is to be used, but you can't say that the mission actually owns the land. You have the use of it for as long as you want to, but, once you take over and say this is my land, a dispute will arise. There is no such thing as I give you the land forever. It is all yours. In return, you give me some tobacco, an axe, or some money. No, it is a relationship thing. I give you the land as long as we are friends. The renewal of relationship is a continuous thing. It is a difficult concept to have.

Over the years there have been many discussions about land use and related issues between St Xavier's school authorities and the local villagers. Pat describes one such incident:

One afternoon the boys came along to me. They had been planting mango trees along the boundary. Some bloke came and pulled them out, claiming the trees were planted on village land. I did nothing for a couple of days. I went into Wewak and bought a carton of beer. Then I went down to the village and got old Kapun, the chief. I said, “Kapun, I've got a carton of beer up there. Will you come up and help me to drink it?” We sat down. We drank the beer until we were both absolutely stonked. We told each other what wonderful fellows we were, and what wonderful people the Kairiruans were. We told all the old stories. Kapun went off happy. There was never any trouble over the boundaries for another three years. The disagreement was all finished. What was happening was that we weren't providing them with the relationships that they needed. Kapun needed the opportunity to argue about the land and talk about the land, because it is a verbal society, not a literate society. Whenever a land problem arose again, there would be another carton of beer. It is a question of establishing relationships. If your relationships are good, everything runs sweetly. If the relationships are bad, nothing runs. That is vital to any understanding of Melanesia.
Independence

Independence came to Papua New Guinea on 16 September 1975. For many, it was the achievement of a dream, for others, it came too quickly, for others still, it was a barely understood puzzlement. Nonetheless, celebrations occurred in various parts of the country. St Xavier's entered a float, beautifully decorated, in the Wewak procession and also participated in the Independence Concert in the town. On Kairiru, to mark the occasion, the students built a huge bonfire high on the slopes of Mt Melangis.
Soon after independence, Brothers Canute Sheehan and Pat Howley applied for, and were granted, PNG citizenship. It was a statement of commitment to the people, a re-assurance that the Australian Brothers were not going to abandon the country, and an act of solidarity with the two recently-professed Sepik Brothers, Herman and Melchior. Shortly afterwards, for similar reasons, Brother Bertrand Webster who was in Bougainville also became a citizen of Papua New Guinea. In the 1990s, Pat and Canute resumed their Australian citizenship, while Bertrand remained a Papua New Guinean.

**Death of Agnes Yakok**

Early in 1980 Agnes Yakok, formerly a cook for the Brothers and always a faithful supporter of St Xavier's, died in her village of Brauniak, not far from the school. Agnes' contribution since the earliest days of St Xavier's was extraordinary. Pat Howley recalls this loyal friend and supporter of the Marist Brothers:

> Agnes, according to one story, paid the Bishop five pounds to bring the Marist Brothers to Kairiru. She felt that, when Baptist and Canute arrived, she sort of owned the Brothers and she had to look after them. So, when Baptist started to build, she rallied the troops and brought people into work. She mixed concrete there with the best of them. She was only a frail little woman too, a wonderful woman. I remember, on one occasion at Sunday Mass, she used to watch the women and the girls going up to communion. One girl was going to communion that she thought shouldn't be, so she rushed over, dragged her out and sat her down again! She used to lead the singing at Mass. She was an extraordinary person. She was the sort of person who was prepared to stand up and defy the whole community when it was necessary. She wasn't afraid to oppose the men if she thought they were wrong. Eventually, when she died, we buried her in a Brother's habit. She was loyal to the Brothers.

**Brothers' House Destroyed by Fire**

Brother Peter Cassidy, headmaster of St Xavier's from 1979 to 1983, was in Australia for a scheduled break at home when disaster struck on Monday 21 December 1981. The *Marist Monthly* of April 1982 reports the incident:
On the Monday before Christmas the Brothers' house at Kairiru was burned to the ground, with the loss of everything in it. Just the week before, eight Brothers spent a week there for their annual retreat, enjoying the prayerful, quiet atmosphere and the meals and hospitality provided by Brother Albert van Berkel. After the retreat ended all Brothers went to the mainland, and the house was unoccupied. The experts say the cause of the fire was electrical. The station generator was turned on in the evening at 6.30. The first sign of trouble was three loud bangs. One of the teachers, investigating the noise, found that flames were already roaring out from under the roof on the second floor and the air was wild with heat, exploding fibro plaster and bullets which had been picked up around the island over the years and left there.

The house, in spite of its lack of finish, its termite infestations and the evidence of amateur construction, had served the Brothers well for sixteen years. The cramped alternative accommodation was less comfortable!

**Later Years at St Xavier's High School**

Pat Howley returned to Kairiru in 1984 and 1985 to take over from Brother Peter Cassidy, Pat's second term as headmaster of St Xavier's. The last two Marist headmasters of St Xavier's were Kevin Hoare (1986-1988) and Majella Fitzpatrick (1989-1991). In 1991 the Marist Brothers decided to localise the administration of St Xavier's, and Mr Camillus Nongi became headmaster in 1992, followed by Mr Joe Gubuli (1993-1995) and Mr Peter Wablasu (1996-1998).

Brother Guy Yuangi, who was a Kairiru student from 1983 to 1986, recalls his school days and some of the teachers who influenced him:

All the Brothers who taught us at Kairiru were very committed. In particular, I remember Brother Paul Johnston. He was my inspiration. As a young student, I admired him, as did many students at that time. We liked the way he related to us and he was a good teacher. He used to take the boys around on the boat and we'd go fishing. He strengthened my interest in becoming a Brother. Later, when I finished school, I went to Teacher's College at Rabaul, and there I wrote a few times to Terry Kane and he came to visit me. It was Terry who nurtured my vocation.

The school enrolment remained around four hundred; several ex-students joined the staff and facilities were gradually upgraded. Volunteer Rotary
teams from Australia assisted with the construction of classroom blocks and other facilities, including the re-building of the administration block destroyed by fire in 1991. The student leadership system based on committees, established in the 1970s, continued successfully for more than twenty years. Sporting trips, exchange visits to the girls' school at Yarapos, and frequent cultural events enriched school life through these years. The Tau K provided the vital link with the mainland for transport of people and supplies, while discussions with the Shem people over the use of land and water continued from time to time.

Withdrawal of Marist Brothers

In 1995 the Marist Brothers' administration began serious discussions about establishing an “outreach community” at Bongos, a remote area of the Sepik. Connected to this discussion was the need to rationalise commitments in the Sepik region, because the Brothers did not have sufficient qualified High School teachers to maintain a presence at Kairiru. The District Council, at its meeting of August 1995, decided...
that the Brothers would withdraw from Kairiru at the end of the following year. The Brothers began to plan suitable celebrations to mark the end of thirty-seven years of Marist Brothers' presence on Kairiru and to look for ways of continuing to support the school after the departure of the Brothers.

In November 1996 a series of functions was held on the island to mark the withdrawal of the Brothers' community. Ray Arthur, the District Superior, spoke on behalf of the Brothers:

In some ways it is a sad occasion that we need to leave Kairiru. It was a difficult decision which has been discussed among the Brothers over a number of years and it has not been taken lightly. Part of the reason is that there are fewer Brothers. But, from the beginning of the Church, it was never intended that missionaries should establish themselves and remain forever. Success is measured in the ability of the local population to continue the work, to hand on its spirit to future generations. After all these years at St Xavier's firm foundations have been laid. It is indeed a satisfaction that so many ex-students have come back to St Xavier's staff as teachers and principals. This is a sign that it is time for us to move on and allow you, the inheritors of this spirit, to move forward. It is not our intention to abandon all interest in St Xavier's. Already, the principal has participated in a Marist School Leaders' conference in Australia and it is our hope that the school will continue to be part of the Marist network. Our Kairiruan Brother, Herman Boyek, will also remain on the Board of Governors. Nor are we abandoning our commitment to the Sepik. Just as St Xavier's was in need thirty-seven years ago, so there are still parts of the Province where young people are crying out for educational opportunities. For this reason we opened a community at Bongos this year, helping to develop this rural area.

The last Marist community at Kairiru comprised Brothers Paul Johnston and Joe Hughes. Due to ill health, the first two Brothers, Patrick (Baptist) Faulkner and Canute Sheehan were unable to attend the farewell weekend. Former staff members Terry Kane, Pat Howley and John Curry joined the local community for the celebrations, along with District Superior Ray Arthur, former District Coordinator Bertrand Webster and the only Kairiruan Marist Brother, Herman Boyek. Thus ended a remarkable period of Marist History on Kairiru Island in the Sepik region of PNG.
Brother Herman Boyek speaking at St Xavier’s Farewell Function
Chapter 17

Ghosts and Politics
Tenaru
1958-1974

Comings and Goings

The 1958 school year at Tenaru opened with an enrolment of ninety-six boys, an increasing population which called for a larger staff of Brothers. Fortunately, the new Solomon Island Brothers, assisted by Bougainvillaean Brothers, were recently professed, enthusiastic and available to begin work among their own people. On 13 January 1958 the first Solomon Island Brothers, Howard Sukuatu and Alphonsus Laumanasa, returned from Australia to join Brothers Colman and Francis Borgia. In spite of their nine-year absence, it was to be another ten months before the two Brothers travelled to their home at Avuavu, a mere seventy kilometres distant, on the weathercoast (the south coast of Guadalcanal). Even then, they slept each night at the mission station and made day visits to their families, as was the custom for Religious in those times. The Marist Monthly of February 1958 describes the welcome at Honiara:

History was made on 13 January when Brothers Howard and Alphonsus, the first Solomon Island Brothers, arrived to begin work among their own people. Sixty boys from the school and many locals were also with our Brothers at the aerodrome to welcome them and they received a right-royal reception. They were taken by car to the new Holy Cross Cathedral at Honiara where a packed congregation assisted at Benediction, our schoolboys doing the singing. Then on to Tanagai, the Bishop's residence, which was decorated for the occasion with large “Welcome Home” signs. The people sang songs of welcome. His Lordship Bishop Aubin spoke, to which Brother Howard replied, to the great admiration of all the assembly. Then came Rosary and another Benediction, after which there was a feast.

Other young Melanesian Brothers soon followed to join the staff: Brothers Edwin Meresinihinua, Chanel Diki, Michael Kaminei and
Bernard Kangku. Over the following years, most of the Melanesian Brothers returned to Sydney for a further year of professional studies. Brother Jude Featherstone arrived in Tenaru in 1958, after fifteen months' recuperation in Australia following his health problems in Kieta. Returning to the staff in 1961 after a ten-year absence was the pioneer of Tenaru, Brother Ervan McDonough, who became headmaster in 1964. Ervan, after nineteen years of missionary service, returned to Australia in September 1966 due to complications from malaria and pneumonia. He died in Brisbane in 1992.

The large community of Brothers at Tenaru from 1958 to the early 1970s included many of the young Melanesian Brothers. Brother Colman was their amiable leader, whose concern for the young Brothers and students alike was greatly appreciated. Nonetheless, there were occasional strains in the community as expatriate and Melanesian Brothers learned to live together, to understand each other's culture, and accommodate to each other's different ways. The community, with its abundance of youthful energy, worked hard at school, managed a huge farm which produced ample food for students and Brothers, repaired pumps, tractors, roads, plumbing, generators and buildings, and raised animals for food and sale. The Brothers also enjoyed regular picnics, fishing trips, walks up
to the nearby Tenaru waterfall, and, during holiday times, trips to the more distant mission stations.

Brothers' House and Chapel until 1965
Painting by Mr Jules Joris, a generous benefactor, who died in 1963

1963 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the school at Marau in 1938. A special visitor from Australia for this occasion, Brother Ephrem, a Marau pioneer from 1938, describes the weeklong celebration:

Celebrations began on 10 August with the Annual Sports Day. I was amazed at the spirit of competition. Before a huge crowd of spectators, the boys gave a fine exhibition of all-round athletic skill. From my position on the dais with Bishop Stuyvenberg and the High Commissioner, I had a grand view of the colourful March Past led by the Police Band. On 15 August the Apostolic Delegate celebrated solemn High Mass in Holy Cross Cathedral. Our boys drew praise from the packed congregation for their beautiful rendition of a four-part Mass. Following the ceremony there was a feast for all Mission personnel and the European and Chinese Catholics of Honiara. It was a gala
affair. Then followed a “Back to Tenaru Weekend” for Old Boys and their families. People came from all over the island and beyond. I was particularly delighted to see all the small children and babies. Severino Ege, of our old Marau school, has nine children. The Brothers and boys catered for all meals for all the visitors on Saturday and Sunday. The great feast on the Sunday evening required six fat bullocks, two big pigs, 100 fish and “Trigger” the stallion, all slaughtered and deliciously cooked in three huge ovens under the supervision of Brother Edwin. There were six hundred puddings, hundreds of doughnuts, half a ton of sweet potatoes and gallons of sweet tea. Dances and singing continued late into the night. A memorable celebration, which will be talked over until our present boys are old men, came to a happy conclusion.

After nearly fifteen years of service at Tenaru, Colman returned to Australia at the end of 1963. The new leader of the community was Brother Ervan McDonagh, who remained until September 1966, when recurring asthma attacks prompted his return to Australia. His replacement was Brother Donald Mahon, who remained until 1971.

On 28 August 1967 Bishop Aubin, who had been ill for some time, died in his small cottage at Visale where he had lived since his retirement in 1958. The Bishop Aubin Field at Tenaru had been named as a memorial on 13 August 1966 in the presence of Brother Hilary, Assistant General, and Brothers Othmar and Bertinus, the Sydney and Melbourne Provincials. This was a fitting tribute to a great missionary, who had always been an ardent supporter of education in Solomon Islands and a good friend of the Marist Brothers.

Further Developments

In the early years of the school, transport to Honiara was occasionally impeded by flood damage to the Lunga River crossing on the highway, some kilometres from the school. Rainfall in the Solomons can be astonishingly heavy. The approach of a heavy tropical downpour is heralded by the pleasant-sounding roar of distant rain on the forest canopy, the sound gradually intensifying until the deluge arrives. Conversation in a building with a corrugated-iron roof is virtually impossible until the cloudburst has passed. In classrooms, teachers are forced to resort to written work at such times. Until the construction of
a high-level bridge across the Lunga River in the 1960s, the residents to the East of the crossing were frequently cut off from Honiara, as the fast flowing waters of the river swept away the bridge after heavy rain in the mountains. The Brothers were often inconvenienced, on at least one occasion being stranded on the town-side of the river. The new bridge was a welcome improvement to the highway to town.
A new residence for the Brothers, constructed between August 1964 and July 1965, was blessed by Bishop Stuyvenberg on 8 August 1965 in the presence of the Sydney Provincial, Brother Othmar Weldon. It was a fine ten-bedroom house, spacious and solidly built at the expense of the Mission. After much negotiation, a six-foot wide verandah was added. The community was still using this house in 2003.

**Japanese War Bones**

From time to time in the years following the Second World War, Japanese War Grave officials visited Guadalcanal. Their purpose was to locate and repatriate the remains of Japanese War Dead. In 1965 some of the students located a crashed Japanese plane in the jungle beside the Tenaru River. Inside were the skeletons of two airmen. Intrigued, the boys retrieved two rusting metal helmets from the wreck, placed some of the bones in each, and carried them back to the school. Donald Mahon accompanied the boys back to the crash site. Donald recalls the event, and its mysterious aftermath:

It was a large twin-engine bomber. It had flipped on its back in the crash, and the jungle vines had completely overgrown it. Nevertheless, it was reasonably well preserved, considering it had been possibly twenty-three years in the jungle. The remains of the two crew were clearly evident. After satisfying myself that we had salvaged all we could from the plane, and being unable to identify its occupants any further, we returned to the college. I told the boys to place the bones in a storeroom, which has become our printery.

For the next three months the strangest thing happened. A distinct knocking from the direction of the printery continued intermittently, week in and week out. It was clearly audible. Always there would be three knocks – knock, knock, knock. At first we thought it was an airlock in a water pipe or some physical defect in the old school buildings. We paid little attention, but eventually the persistence of the knocking drove us to check the water pipes. Then it was the walls, then the flooring. When the eerie noise still didn't stop, we practically tore the whole darned printery down and re-built it. The boys knew that it was the bones making the noise. I don't believe in ghosts, but I was prepared to consider their theory. In the end it became a bit of a joke. We'd be in class and the knocking would start. One of the boys would grin and say, “Japanese bones, Brother.” We'd all smile and say, “Yes” and listen - and it would stop. Then in 1966 a party of Japanese War Grave Officials arrived in search of war dead for burial in Japan. The party included a Shinto priest. We told them about the bones we had found. When the priest saw the two tiny piles of bones,
still contained in the rusting helmets in the printery, tears began running down his cheeks. He lit some tapers and held a special ceremony, to which we were invited. Later, in another ritual, he cast some of the bones into the sea. The others he took back to Japan. From the moment of that ceremony we never heard the knocking again. Later, the War Graves Officials built a small memorial to the fallen Japanese fighters in the grounds of the school.

Brother Donald Mahon, location of Japanese remains, 1965

The Death of Brother Alphonsus Laumanasa

It was Holy Saturday, 25 March 1967. The following day, Easter Sunday, was to be celebrated at St Joseph's Tenaru with a big feast, a motu, which required hot stones. [In PNG, the equivalent is “mumu”.] About 5.30 a.m. Alphonsus set out on the tractor to collect river stones for the motu. He had a group of boys with him, travelling on the trailer behind the tractor. They found a good spot on the river, about four kilometres distant from the school. As they were driving into the riverbed, the tractor had a flat tyre. Alphonsus instructed his boys, “Okay boys, start loading the trailer with stones; I'll run back to the school and collect the truck.” By 6.30, he had arrived back at school, collected a spare tyre for the tractor and was ready to drive back to the river. As he approached
the river he experienced severe chest pains. He parked the truck, told the boys of his distress, and then collapsed. The boys quickly placed Alphonsus in the truck and one of the boys drove the vehicle back to the school. Alphonsus was rushed immediately to hospital, but was dead on arrival. Bishop Stuyvenberg anointed him.

Alphonsus' sudden death was a shock to everyone because he had never been seriously sick at any time and he was only thirty-two years of age. He was buried later the same day, in a quiet spot on the school property,
with a large number of people in attendance. Bishop Stuyvenberg, who had anointed him earlier in the day, conducted the ceremony. The death of this young, popular, energetic Brother was a great loss to the school. A young Brother of considerable potential, a committed Religious, an effective teacher and a hard worker around the school, Alphonsus was a model for his young students and an inspiration for his confreres. He continues to be so. In 1981, Laumanasa House was named in his honour at Sixteen Mile, Central Province, PNG. When the student house was constructed at Tenaru in 1987, that became Laumanasa House because of the Solomon Islands location; the name of the Sixteen Mile House was no longer used. Alphonsus was the first Solomon Island Brother to die.

**A Disagreement with Diocesan Authorities**

Up until the 1970s the Marist Brothers General Administration had a policy that Brothers did not teach females. From the viewpoint of the twenty-first century, this policy seems strange indeed, yet in those times it was fairly widely accepted throughout the Catholic Church that Sisters were the best people to teach girls, while Brothers (or Priests) were the best teachers for boys. It happened that, in Solomon Islands, the Marist Fathers were ahead of the Marist Brothers in adapting this policy to the needs of the modern Church. Bishop Stuyvenberg saw a need to establish a co-educational high school in Solomon Islands, both to provide equitable educational opportunities for girls and to rationalize staffing and the necessary facilities. He was also encouraged by a new Government policy which promised modest funding to assist in the establishment of secondary schools. The Bishop suggested that Marist Priests, Sisters and Brothers would jointly staff such a school. Again, on this point, the Marist Brothers superiors demurred, because, under the plan, the headmaster would be a priest. The Brothers were reluctant to participate in such an arrangement. In fact, in a letter to the Bishop of 6 August 1965, the Provincial, Brother Othmar, suggested that, if the Brothers were limited to teaching primary classes, they would seriously consider withdrawing from the Vicariate entirely. On the issue of co-education Othmar was constrained by the Congregation's policy, and, in those days, he was unable to act on his own authority in such matters.
Besides the co-education issue, other matters were of concern to the priests advising the Bishop. Changes in society meant that fewer Tenaru students and ex-students participated in the life of the mission (assisting the priest, attending Mass regularly), and there were fewer vocations to the priesthood. Some of the clergy felt this reflected badly on St Joseph's, and welcomed the opportunity of appointing a priest as headmaster of the new school.

Relations with the Bishop remained cordial. The Bishop confirmed his decision that a new Catholic High School would go ahead, even though the Brothers were not able to provide teachers there. St Paul's Secondary Catholic School opened at Aruligo, about thirty kilometres west of Honiara, with Father Michael Bellenoit SM as headmaster. Two Marist Sisters were on the staff, together with another priest and a coadjutor Brother. The Marist Brothers agreed to remain at Tenaru which, from 1967, had primary classes only.

In the post-Vatican Church of the late 1960s and early 1970s, five years was a long time. By 1972 the Marist Brothers had relaxed their policy on teaching in co-educational schools. In addition, developments in Government policy threatened the viability of Tenaru as a primary school because, under the new scheme, responsibility for primary education was to revert to the villages. St Paul's at Aruligo, meanwhile, had problems of its own. The electrical and water supply systems were in need of urgent and expensive repairs, and during the wet season, the school was invariably isolated from town when the roads were cut. Furthermore, the larger numbers of priestly vocations, which some had hoped St Paul's would provide, did not eventuate. For all these reasons, the Catholic Director of Education, Father John Roughan SM, began canvassing the idea of transferring St Paul's back to Tenaru, a proposal which would ensure the future viability of Tenaru and avoid costly renovations and repairs at Aruligo. Bishop Stuyvenberg and the Provincial, Brother Othmar, arrived at a new agreement whereby the secondary school would be relocated to Tenaru, where Marist Brothers would be part of the staff. One of the clauses was that the Bishop would appoint the headmaster.
By 1972 three of the Solomon Island Brothers had left the Institute: Raphael Tura, Benedict Kinika and Howard Sukuatu. With the untimely death of Alphonse, these departures and the impending closure of the primary section of the school, necessitated further staff changes in 1972. The new arrivals were Brothers Paul Murphy, Brian Mahony (formerly Finan) and Clarence Cunningham, the latter two having had previous mission experience at Kieta in Bougainville. With Brother Bernard Kangku, this made a considerably reduced community of four. It is clear that the Provincial had Clarence in mind as the first headmaster of the new co-educational Tenaru Secondary School. The Bishop had other ideas.

At a meeting in August 1972, attended by Clarence, Bishop Stuyvenberg announced that the new headmaster of the school for 1973 would be Father Terry Kelly SM, the headmaster at Aruligo. Clarence was left very puzzled by the outcome of the meeting. He, and all the Brothers, had expected that a Marist Brother would be appointed. Consequently, Clarence returned to Australia at the end of 1972. Ironically, Father Kelly was himself hesitant to take up the headmastership at Tenaru. He was mid-way through an anthropology degree with Monash University in Australia and wanted to complete his fieldwork at Tarapaina on Small Malaita, where he was becoming fluent in the local language. On the other hand, he was aware that the Aruligo students were not entirely happy about the relocation and believed that adjusting to a new headmaster would add to their difficulty. The reluctant Father Kelly turned out to be an effective headmaster who worked hard to create a unified staff from the former Aruligo and Tenaru staffs. The merger of the two schools was not without its problems, as some of the Tenaru boys objected to the invasion of their male domain by the young ladies. These issues were eventually resolved, and St Joseph's Tenaru began a new phase of its history. The fact that Tenaru was now a “new” school was signified by a new name, “Catholic Secondary School, Tenaru”, to make it clear that this was neither a continuation of St Paul's nor of St Joseph's.

The Brothers were not entirely happy with the change of name. “St Joseph's is dead!” lamented Brian Mahony. As a symbolic joke, Brian,
Paul Murphy and Clarence carried the statue of St Joseph from the front of the school to the cemetery, where he remained for the ensuing five years.

At the end of 1974, Father Kelly completed his brief term as headmaster and Jeffrey Crowe, a Marist Brother from Australia who had been Father Terry's deputy in 1974, became his successor. The Diocese sold the site of the former St Paul's School at Aruligo; some of the buildings were later removed to Tenaru. At least one of those was still in use at the school in 2003. Some years later, when the strong feelings about these events had subsided, the school's name reverted to “St Joseph's Catholic Secondary School”. This change, which occurred in 1978 to coincide with Independence celebrations, was heartily welcomed by the older ex-students of St Joseph's. The statue of St Joseph “came back from the grave” and was placed in a prominent location on the front lawn. At Independence time, a special independence tree was planted nearby, and an attractive garden created around the statue. In its new location, the statue of Joseph once again became a focal point for the school.
Chapter 18

Rigu Singsing
Bougainville
1966-1975

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of steady growth and consolidation for St Joseph's School at Rigu. Against the backdrop of exploration, development and operation of the new Panguna mine-site and the development of nearby Arawa town, the school continued its mission of bringing secondary education to young Bougainvilleans. This period was characterized by gradual development of new curricula, as the Australian syllabuses were gradually replaced, amid much trial and error, with locally produced material. Extra-curricular activities, notably the choir and the ambulance service were prominent in this period. Around this time too, there was a greater involvement in cultural activities such as singsings and traditional dances.

The Tok Pisin word “singsing” has several meanings: besides the expected meaning of singing or dancing, it can also refer to traditional dancing, liturgical music, incantations, or any rhythmic swaying motion. A feast often accompanies a traditional singsing. “Singsing kaur” is a popular form of traditional dance ritual from Central Bougainville, comprising large-group singing and dancing, while progressing in a circular motion. Besides having cultural significance, singsing kaur can also be infectious good fun. There are numerous traditional dance and song customs from the different language groups on the island, frequently modified or modernized according to the occasion and the whim of the performers. Bougainvilleans have a natural ability for rhythm and harmony; in fact, all major celebrations are accompanied by singsings, to the enjoyment of all participants. Music is a part of life.
Mining Exploration

From 1964 the mining company CRA (Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd) carried out extensive exploration and surveying of the Panguna copper deposits. Helicopters buzzed the skies above Kieta and plans were afoot to construct a road into the mountains to the exploratory drilling sites. While largely peripheral to school life, the mine's development and operation was one of the factors which gradually changed the milieu of Central Bougainville society. The mine provided some significant advantages for the school, including scholarships for further studies, as the company's support for education was one way of improving its public image. “The benefits derived from the copper will be considerable,” reported the Marist Monthly of October 1965, “but the Brothers and boys are more appreciative of the occasional film the company generously supplies to the school.” In 1965 no one was aware of the crisis that lay ahead, but by 1969 the same journal carried the following prophetic entry:

Beyond the boundaries of our school, Bougainville people are involved in a rising action of protest against the seizure of land. It is uncertain what the eventual reaction of the people will be, but this could materialize into revolt.

Staff Changes

New arrivals in the 1960s included Brother Julian Quinlan, Brother Montfort Hickey and Brother Berchmans (Kevin) Murray, who had worked in Rabaul at the end of the 1950s. Berchmans assisted Brother Cornelius Keating with the teacher trainees, and later worked in the primary school. He recalls the hard work involved in clearing stumps from the school garden at Toniva and a satisfying project of building a new kitchen for the school. With his helpers Berchmans made more than 16,000 concrete bricks for this and other buildings. Brother Montfort became the school's headmaster in 1969; and while Julian achieved many things at Rigu he is probably best remembered for his contribution to the Rigu choir, a story that comes later. Three Brothers from USA worked at Rigu in this period - Kevin O'Neill for two years, Peter Leonard for five years and finally Louis Dubois, who served at Rigu from 1975 to 1980. This arrangement with the USA Provinces
was an exchange for Australian Brothers serving in Pakistan which was closed to USA citizens at that time. At the beginning of 1969 two more Australians joined the staff, Brothers Vivian Robertson and Bertrand Webster. Vivian stayed three years; Bertrand for many years longer. Bertrand, after the culture shock of arrival, considered an early return home, as he explains:

I first got interested in New Guinea when I was trying to get my students at North Sydney interested in other cultures and other places. At the same time I was teaching them about the Pope's Encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples). I felt inadequate because I had no experience of other cultures. Wanting to be authentic, I wrote to the Provincial, Brother Othmar, asking him if I could go to the missions. Eventually he said yes. I was excited and I tried to find out lots of things about New Guinea. I was more interested in geography than people. On landing in Port Moresby, I had two early impressions: one, it was so hot I was barely able to breathe; two, I had never seen so many black people. When I finally got to Kieta, it was the end of the holidays and the property was overgrown and unkempt. Everybody was running around fixing up taps. I felt totally inadequate because I didn't know how to fix taps. I had a funny little room at the end of the dormitory where the floor was rotten. I decided I was too ashamed to return home right away, but I wanted to go home. But I had said goodbye to so many people, I knew I couldn't do that. I decided to stay for two years. I thought, “I will just organise this room, make it comfortable for myself. I will go to school, do my teaching, and then come up here.” It was total culture shock. But that lasted about four days. Then things started improving.

After six years in the country, Bertrand, discovering the appeal of the song of Bougainville, wanted to join the singsing himself. He became a Papua New Guinean citizen just after Independence and was headmaster of Rigu for six years, in two different appointments, in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1970 Brother Jeffrey Crowe, together with Brothers Kevin Ryan and Joseph Hall, joined the staff. Jeffrey later became the first District Superior of the Marist Brothers in PNG and Solomon Islands.

**Curriculum Matters**

Rigu, along with other Territory schools, followed the Queensland school syllabus until the early 1960s, when aspects of the New South Wales based “Wyndham Scheme” were adopted. It was at that time that the
secondary classes became known as “Forms”. In the 1970s local PNG curricula were gradually developed and replaced those from New South Wales. A new subject “Social Science”, with PNG content, replaced the former History and Geography courses. “Until that time, we studied Australian explorers and learned about the Australian States,” recalls Bertrand Webster. Practical subjects such as agriculture, mechanics, woodwork and metalwork, which had always been a feature of the school's offering, became better organised around the same time. In 1974, Bertrand organised the purchase of equipment for a language laboratory which was set up in the former metalwork room renovated for the purpose; Brother Christopher Marden supervised the construction and equipping of a new metal workshop, using materials from a former Panguna mine building.

Silver Jubilee

1966 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Marist Brothers' presence in Bougainville. Firminus Bobo, a Rigu teacher-trainee of the time, recorded his impressions of the celebrations in Rigu's annual school magazine, *The Chronicle*:

A Mass of thanksgiving was to be the important feature. We wanted to have a special feast, the Brothers wanted to give a banquet and we had to have a concert. Bishop Lemay celebrated the Mass, which was attended by many priests, Brothers and local people, and all the Marist Sisters who had assembled for their retreat. The Assistant-General, Brother Hilary, and the Provincial, Brother Bertinus, were special guests. Julian had composed the music of the Mass, and a great deal of preparation had been put into the singing. The Form One boys prepared their room for the Brothers' special dinner. The tables and the room were nicely decorated, and all the food and drink was set out before the guests arrived. Among the guests were Baimbai, Kaki, our Form Four boys and the senior teacher-trainees. The choir performed at the concert and a group of small boys thrilled us with their tumbling. Dancing, specially arranged by the Nissan and Buka boys, concluded the evening and our wonderful celebrations.

Building Improvements

During 1967 four new dining halls were added to the facilities. The students themselves made the tables. “Everybody uses modern utensils
and we eat like gentlemen,” reported Form Three student Mario Tavugi in the 1967 school magazine, *The Chronicle*. Meanwhile, a long-overdue change was already under way in another part of the campus.

Brothers’ Original House, c. 1962 – Note Champagnat Statue
As new buildings mushroomed and Simeon's old Quonset structures were replaced, the Brothers' ageing house was the sole remnant of an earlier time. In 1966 the Brothers, who for some years had been living in crowded conditions, decided it was time to extend their house.

Br Finan Mahony produced the creative design and was the supervisor of the project. The manager of works was an Irish lay missionary, Jim O'Hagen, who, over the following twelve months, advanced the construction in spite of the usual delays in obtaining building materials. With its ambitious double-storey, L-shaped design, unique outward sloping supports and generously wide verandah, it became the largest building in the school complex. During 1967 Jim O'Hagen returned to Australia. As a result progress on the house was delayed for some time, until a group of Brothers and helpers from Australia arrived in December 1967 to work intensively on the building over the holiday period. Brother Colman Carroll, from Lismore, Australia, and Brothers Baylon Ryan and Dunstan Cavanagh, were in the group, together with some of Colman's tradesmen friends from Lismore. Under Colman's leadership the construction advanced quickly over those few weeks, allowing completion of the house later in 1968, two and a half years after construction began. This residence, with ten bedrooms, offices, parlour, and spacious dining room, served the needs of the community for the remaining years of the school. Its proximity to the beach was a delightful feature.
Kieta Juniorate

A long time had elapsed since the Marist Brothers accepted Melanesian candidates to join their ranks. It seems the Sydney Marist superiors made a decision not to accept further candidates after the first groups went to Australia in the 1950s. As a result, there are no Melanesian Brothers in the age groups between the first 1950s pioneers and those who went to the Fiji Novitiate in the 1970s. The Sydney Provincial Council was aware of the difficulties the first Melanesian Brothers experienced, particularly during their period of teacher training at Champagnat College at Dundas in Sydney, Australia, where Marist Brothers undertook professional studies from 1958. At such institutions in the 1950s and 1960s, formators had limited understanding of Melanesian cultural and educational needs and thus expected the Melanesian Brothers to undertake the same formation and studies as their Australian counterparts. By the 1970s a new understanding of cultural anthropology awakened in the Church the realization that the essence of Christianity (and therefore of Religious Life) is to be distinguished from the Western cultural expressions of Christianity familiar to Australians and other Westerners. Although Melanesian Marist Brothers will live out their Religious Life in quite different ways from Australian Marists, both are authentic expressions of the Marist ideal. It is an ongoing challenge.

An important step in this process for the Marist Brothers occurred in January 1967, when they accepted three candidates to study, not in Australia as their predecessors had done long ago, but at Rigu. Montfort Hickey was appointed Master of Juniors. The three boys, two from Solomon Islands and one from Bougainville, attended school with the other Rigu students and had regular meetings with Montfort. One reason for the choice of Rigu rather than Tenaru as a site for the Juniorate was the imminent closure of the secondary department of the school at Tenaru, a story recounted in the previous chapter. The then headmaster of Tenaru, Brother Donald (John) Mahon explains further:

The Brothers at Tenaru at the time were very much in favour of having boys trained to be Brothers, not in Australia, but in the Islands, nearer to their own culture. It was something I very much pushed in speaking to the
Australian superiors. We felt the boys would lose contact with the Brothers once the new Solomon Islands Secondary School opened, where they would no longer have the influence of Marist Brothers. This was one reason we were keen for our prospective candidates to complete their schooling with the Brothers at Rigu.

Two of the first Rigu Juniors later went to the Australian Novitiate, Solomon Islander Celestine Kulagoe in 1969, and New Guinean Luke Romaso the following year. Celestine, who made vows in 1971 and left the Congregation some years later, died about 2000. In 1969 a special building was provided for the Juniorate, comprising a dormitory and study. One of the juniors that year was Julian Pinonas, later known as Brother Julian Hakumin. He recalls his Juniorate days at Rigu:

In the Juniorate we had our own study desks, which we had made during our woodwork classes. I used to like studying in the Juniorate at night. It was quieter, there was nice fresh air from the sea breezes, the lighting was better and we also had insect screening. There was an air of freshness about the building because it was still very new. I was privileged to be one of its early occupants. We had our Saturday prayers and gathering with Montfort, our Master of Juniors. At other times the Juniors went for picnics to a river or the beach. The Juniors participated in all the school activities. Three of us were in the A grade soccer team which competed in the town competition.

In 1971 Julian, together with John Kinna, Victor Kikiluma and Timothy Fositau, proceeded to the newly opened Pacific Novitiate at Lomeri, Fiji, where three were professed as Marist Brothers on 1 November 1972, a significant re-birth for the Marist Brothers of New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

The small Juniorate building did not have a long life. In December 1972 the coastal erosion, to which the school property was prone, caused the Juniorate to fall into the sea. The acting headmaster of the time, Julian Quinlan, recalls the disaster:

When the Brothers got up in the morning, a large section of land had disappeared. One corner of the Juniorate was hanging over the sea. The building was intact, but the sea was undercutting it. We removed all the contents and began to dismantle the building. By 11 a.m. it was too dangerous to do further work inside the building and it gradually fell into the sea during the course of the afternoon. By this stage, we were concerned for the safety
of the boys' kitchen, a fine brick building constructed by Berchmans four years previously. We rang Bougainville Copper, who flew down two engineers, who arranged for used truck tyres, each three metres in diameter and a tonne in weight, to be trucked down from the mine. Trucks, bulldozers and cranes worked through the night, dumping more than sixty tonnes of waste rock and several hundred of the huge tyres onto the eroding coastline. Our buildings were saved.

At least one of the Brothers was concerned about the newly constructed Brothers' house, also located quite close to the shore. Was it the power of prayer or the BCL (Bougainville Copper Limited) tyres that saved the building? Brother Daniel McEwen explains:

Peter Leonard got a statue of St Joseph and put it outside, between the Brothers' house and the shoreline. He said, “St Joseph, this is your school; you look after it.” The waves didn't come in any further; all other buildings were safe. When I was there, that statue was still standing. Sometimes when there was a high tide around January, the waves would come in and they would wash onto the grass. The statue would be surrounded by water, but that shoreline never fell in. St Joseph looked after the school. I suppose he believed it, too. Peter was that sort of person.

**The Sound of Music**

It was in 1959 that Brother Kevin Eaton served on a committee which organised the first Kieta choral festival. Twenty-eight choirs from various parts of Bougainville participated. The Rigu choir, under the direction of Kevin, “was unsuccessful in carrying off any of the prizes, though they performed creditably” (Annals, 1959). In the 1960s
Clarence Cunningham encouraged choral performances, conducting the choir himself on several occasions. Subsequent years brought much greater success, particularly after the arrival of Julian Quinlan in 1966. The previous year Julian completed his musical studies (A.Mus.A.), and his expertise contributed to the later achievements of the Rigu choir, which, at its height, comprised the entire school. By 1969 the Rigu choir had grown to 250 voices; their performance of a Spanish medley, harmonized in seven parts, won the prize for best choir for the fourth consecutive year. Julian brought a new level of organization and discipline to their performance.

Peter Kalosoi, a student at Rigu from 1969 to 1972, recalls Julian and the choir:

Julian was our choirmaster. He was strict, stricter than Br. Montfort. The boys didn't like that side of it too much, but otherwise they liked his choir because that used to boost the school's image. During those years we used to have the choral festival every Queen's Birthday, and schools like Asitavi, Hutjena and the Seventh Day Schools used to compete. Rigu always won the prizes for the top choir and the top conductor - no one could beat us.

Julian himself recalls the strict discipline that was needed to maintain the choir's high standard:

I was very strict during choir rehearsals. The students did not dare look aside. I suppose, looking back, I do not think I could do it that way now. I can remember one occasion when we went down to practise at the choral festival grounds, and, as we were singing *No Stain in Thee*, an enormous explosion went off down at the wharf. Kaboom, right on the downbeat. Not one student turned a hair! They just sang on as if nothing had happened. When we got to the end of it, of course, they all turned around to have a look. Another rule I had was that they were never allowed to sing the choral festival songs outside of practice, lest they learn it wrongly, or teach their part to the others. Over the years I was there I never heard them singing our songs outside of practice, or heard evidence of it.

As Rigu choir's reputation grew, the local Radio Station, Radio Bougainville, *Maus Bilong Sankamap*, recorded their work. Later, several records were cut and sold throughout Bougainville and the Australian network of Marist Schools. From the proceeds, school
equipment, including a photocopier, a duplicator machine and overhead projectors were purchased. In 1999 the ex-students’ organization in Port Moresby decided to re-issue a cassette tape of songs from the recordings, for sale to old-boys and friends as a memento of their school days.

In February 1974 Queen Elizabeth II visited Bougainville with her entourage of Prince Phillip, Princess Anne, Captain Mark Phillips and Lord Mountbatten. The Rigu choir, which by then had 380 voices, performed their signature medley of songs from *The Sound of Music*, first performed eight years earlier at the 1966 choral festival. The school captain, Patrick Tsirato, presented the Queen with copies of the Choir's recordings. Another initiative was the formation of a drum and fife band, which always led the school when they participated in the annual Anzac Day procession. Wherever they performed, the band boys created quite a sensation, with their smart white uniforms and polished performances.

![Rigu Students, Anzac Day Procession, c. 1970](image)

Julian's contribution to St Joseph's Rigu went far beyond the choir's success. Fascinated by the natural musical and dance talent of the boys, he and other Brothers encouraged them in the preservation of their own cultural heritage. In 1974 Julian collected words and music of over six hundred Bougainvillean songs in various languages and published them in a book, *Bougainville Sings*. Around this time there
were frequent cultural performances or informal singsings at the school. An enjoyable day each year was the National Day in September. In 1972, for the National Day, the school chose the theme “Unity in Bougainville”. The Brothers organised activities which would assist all students (and themselves) to learn more about the diverse cultures of Bougainville. Some expatriate Brothers attempted to learn one of the local languages. The Annals records the occasion:

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National Day, celebrated in September, had the theme “Bougainville Unity”. Boys from the Nasioi and Nagovis areas prepared enough pipes for all the school to use in a singsing; the Buka boys prepared enough bamboo tsiguls (an instrument played by pounding it on the ground, creating a resonant sound in the hollow bamboo) for everybody. To enable everyone to take part in the Tinputz/Teop dancing, Julian visited villages in those areas during the holidays and, with $100 provided by the Diocesan Education Board for cultural studies, purchased twenty-five kundu drums, which remain a permanent asset of the school. The entire school learnt the songs for these three sets of dances. The celebration started with an open-air Mass, sung in Pidgin to the accompaniment of the drums, bamboo and pipes. Dressed with
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Location of some of Bougainville’s twenty major language groups
traditional singsing decoration, everyone participated in the singsing which followed: one hour with everyone doing the Buka tsigul; one hour with everybody doing the Nasioi/Nagovis singsing kaur; and one hour with everybody doing the Tinputz/Teop dance. Afterwards, all three dances continued simultaneously until morning. On the following Monday afternoon, everyone went by bus to Arawa to take part in the singsing organised there. On Tuesday evening the Brothers organised a language competition at the school. Over the preceding months boys had been encouraged to learn what they could of a language from an area not their own. Two Australian Brothers participated in the competition, Joseph Hall learning Nasioi and Jeffrey Crowe learning Halia. Jeffrey reached the final, but, in a close contest, one of the students defeated him in extra time.

Such events exemplified mission education at its best, respecting and promoting local cultures in activities which were clearly a lot of fun.

Central Bougainville Developments

The mining company built a town on the site of Arawa Plantation, ten kilometres west of the school. By 1973 Arawa, a residential and commercial centre for expatriate and national company employees, had become a thriving centre, whose services rivalled those of any regional town in Australia. In November of that year, the Rigu students were given a special trip to town to visit the newly opened Arawa supermarket. The dazzling array of goods available in the town was something new for all Bougainville residents; many locals adapted to the western ways, and those with access to the new cash flow took advantage of it. The long term effects of these and other sudden changes in Central Bougainville were not all good, as Brother Pat Howley has explained in *Breaking Spears and Mending Hearts*. Between 1972 and 1988 Arawa's
population had grown from 5,000 to 15,000 to become the third largest town in the country. After 1988 the onset of the Bougainville Crisis triggered a rapid exodus of non-Bougainvilleans from Arawa and Panguna towns. Meanwhile, the school at Rigu was connected to the town electricity supply in May 1972. “No more generator worries - and power twenty-four hours a day,” wrote the obviously delighted Annalist. This benefit continued until after the closure of the school in 1989.

![Part of Rigu Campus 1974](image)

Buildings L to R: Workshop, Dormitory, Classrooms, Double storey buildings comprising dormitory above and classrooms below, Brothers' House

**Rigu Ambulance and Rescue Services**

From 1975 to 1978 a St John Ambulance and Rescue Unit was based at the school, under the direction of Daniel McEwen. Daniel, the son of a doctor, arrived in Kieta in February 1973, fresh from completing a twelve months' full-time nursing course at Lewisham hospital in Sydney, Australia. Brother Casimir Novak, who stayed at Rigu for two years, arrived at the same time. Brother Christopher Marden, a man with diverse skills, particularly in mechanics, had arrived the previous year. Daniel was assistant infirmary to Peter Leonard until 1974, when Peter returned to USA and Daniel took charge of medical matters. The Rigu Ambulance Service had its origin in a first-aid club, which Daniel ran on Friday afternoons to train boys to assist in the aid-post and to attend to all kinds of first-aid matters. Meanwhile, with the chief ambulance officer at Panguna Mine, Daniel was a foundation member of the Panguna St John Ambulance Division. Knowing that his appointment at Rigu would not be permanent, and realising that the first-aid club was dependent on his expertise, Daniel was at first reluctant to begin a St John Cadet Division at the school. A visiting St John Commissioner, Graham Smith, was so impressed with the quality of first-aid care
March 1975, BCL, recognizing Daniel's competence and enthusiasm, donated a second-hand ambulance vehicle to the Rigu St John Division. There was a need for an ambulance vehicle to serve the highway to Aropa airport, as Daniel explains:

The Arawa-based government ambulance at the time consisted of a panel van whose driver held no first-aid qualification. He had no first-aid kit and was unable to treat casualties. The closest mine ambulance was at Loloho (the port for the mine). Our section of highway, with its increasing amount of traffic going backwards and forwards to the airport, wasn't covered by a qualified ambulance service. If there was a road accident, it was a long way for one of the mine's ambulances to come from Loloho, or, worse still, all the way from the Panguna mine. We were ideally located between Arawa and the airport so the company was keen for us to have an ambulance service based at the school. Of course, it would benefit everyone, not just Bougainville Copper employees. The body of the donated vehicle was in fairly poor shape but the engine was OK. Inside, there was nothing: just a rusting floor. Chris Marden patched the rust holes with panel metal and I laid a new plywood floor, covered it with vinyl floor tiles and built a cupboard/seat along one side. It came with a wheeled stretcher. It had a revolving light and a siren. We got it registered and advertised our ambulance service as being for emergency calls only. Bougainville Copper
supplied a radio and we operated on their ambulance frequency (call sign “Kieta Ambulance”). That first year we responded to 56 calls.

Four months later, the Lions Club of Panguna donated a more reliable ambulance vehicle, which the Lions Club replaced again in 1977 by a newer vehicle. Meanwhile BCL invited Chris Marden, working in partnership with Daniel, to establish a Rescue Unit, and provided a vehicle of sorts which required enormous work to put on the road. Daniel continues:

A rolled, wrecked and written-off Holden utility, with grass growing in it, was delivered off the back of a truck (courtesy of the Lions Club) and Chris re-built it from the ground up. He also designed and built a back and top for it and moved his panel-beating equipment (hydraulic spreaders, jacks and other tools) into it. Bougainville Copper gave us a second radio (call sign “Kieta Rescue”). We then had two operational vehicles: Ford Ambulance and Holden Rescue Unit. If I was called to a road accident, we would both go. Chris could free trapped motorists with his specialised knowledge and equipment and did so on more than one occasion. Just as I had cadets rostered
on call with the ambulance, Chris had one or two rostered on call with the Rescue Unit.

The ambulance and rescue unit did great service, receiving callouts, on average, twice weekly over the following three years. Daniel was transferred back to Australia at the end of 1978 and Christopher followed in 1980. After the departure of these Brothers the expertise needed to run the ambulance and rescue unit was gone. Furthermore, there was growing concern about the effect of the increasingly frequent callouts on the studies of the cadets, who were often called during classes or during night hours. Thus ended an initiative which was a great contribution to health care in central Bougainville and an interesting chapter in the history of Rigu High School.

Death of Baimbai

In June 1974 Baimbai, a man who had been a friend of the Brothers from the first days of their arrival on Rigu beach twenty-six years earlier, died quietly in his village, after a significant return to Rigu the day he died. Daniel, who cared for Baimbai during that last visit to the school, remembers:

When I got to Bougainville, Baimbai and Kaki had been retired for many years and were both quite elderly. I got a message that Baimbai was very sick and he wanted to see me. So, with a couple of the ambulance cadets, I went over to his village. It was dark inside the house, the fire was going, the house was full of smoke and my eyes were smarting. Baimbai was lying on a bed, obviously very sick. I wanted to take him to the hospital immediately, but he didn't want to go. Instead he wanted to come over to our aid post at the school. So the people brought him over on a stretcher. We tried to get a doctor to come and attend him, but the only one available was a female expatriate. That was no good; he didn't want to see a lady doctor. I think he just wanted to come back to Rigu and be back at his school for a while. He knew he was dying. We washed him from head to toe and looked after him. Kaki moved into the sickbay, on a mat on the floor next to his bed. She cooked meals for him, preparing the sort of food that he liked. All we could do was to give him basic nursing care, keeping him clean, keeping his bed nice, looking after him as best we could. He had about a day with us. I think it was a Saturday morning when he said that he was going to die. “Mi dai nau. Dai pinis. Bai mi go bek long ples.” (I'm going to die now; take me back to the village.) He wanted to go home to die. He thanked us for having
With the assistance of Brother Clarence Cunningham in Australia, the Brothers arranged for the shipping of a headstone, at the base of which was inscribed, “A true friend of the Marist Brothers.” Indeed he was.

**Independence**

The secessionist movement gathered strength prior to PNG's Independence Day, 16 September 1975. Bougainvilleans always considered themselves “different” from other Papua New Guineans, but the problems associated with the Panguna Mine galvanized the Bougainville independence movements. Some of the problems were the perceived unfair distribution of profits and benefits from the mine, and the large number of non-Bougainvillean nationals employed by the mine, who used land or formed squatter settlements that were said to be havens for criminals. It was a question of re-claiming Bougainville and its assets for Bougainvilleans.

In August 1975 Father John Momis, a politically active priest who was the Regional Member for Bougainville in the Territory's House of
Assembly, spoke to the Rigu students about Bougainville's intention to declare itself an independent state on 1 September, pre-empting the National Independence Day scheduled for 16 September.

Bougainville Independence Day coincided with the re-opening of school after the term holidays. The headmaster, Bertrand Webster, impressed on his students that they were to follow their parents' wishes with regard to participation in the Independence Celebrations in Arawa town on 1 September. He asked his expatriate staff not to be involved, while allowing the Bougainvillean staff freedom to make their own decision about taking the day off school to participate. In fact, there were no students to teach on the day, as all were at the Independence celebrations in Arawa or at home in their villages.

In spite of Bougainville claiming to be an “independent republic”, the Provincial Government continued to operate under the auspices of Papua New Guinea, while the political struggle to regain power from the National Government persisted. PNG Independence Day passed in an uneasy fashion. The call for secession continued over the following fourteen years until the onset of the Bougainville Crisis brought this, among other issues, to a head.
Chapter 19

Rokera, Solomon Islands

St Peter and Paul School

The Marist Fathers established a mission station at Rokera on the west coast of Small Malaita in the 1930s. By 1971 the Marist Brothers had sufficient men to open new communities at Vanga Point in Western District and at Rokera. The Rokera community, comprising Brothers Chanel Diki and John Paul Mauro, was unique for two reasons: it was the first community composed entirely of Melanesians, and the community shared a house with the Dutch parish priest, Father Herman Kloosterman SM. Though not ideal, this accommodation arrangement continued until the closure of the community in 1975. Father Kloosterman was usually a quiet person, with a good sense of humour, a capacity to laugh at himself and an ability to get things done. He was a strong independent character who rarely budged from his views, a trait which gave rise to clashes from time to time.

The mission buildings, located on elevated ground some three hundred metres from the ocean, consisted of a Church, residences, school buildings and dispensary. The school staff consisted of the two Brothers, two Sisters from the local Solomon Islands Congregation, Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI), and two lay teachers. Chanel was the headmaster.

In 1971, St Peter and Paul School had 176 students, both boys and girls; most were boarders. The classes ranged from Standard Two to Standard Seven. Lessons were taught from 7.45 a.m. until 2.00 p.m., after which, work in the garden occupied the students for the remainder of the afternoon. Four large gardens were established, which generally provided most of the students' food.
At times relationships between Chanel and the parish priest were strained, some points of contention being disagreements about finance, Kloosterman's perception of Chanel's abilities as an administrator and teacher, and his reluctance to allow the Brothers to use his tractor and trailer. These human communication difficulties must have been awkward in a shared house on an isolated mission station. No doubt there was fault on both sides. Visiting superiors, including Brother Hilary Conroy, Assistant General from Rome, were not satisfied with the community's shared living arrangements, but there was little that could be done at short notice to resolve the problem. Brothers joining the staff in the later years of St Peter and Paul School were Michael Kaminei, Bernard Kangku, Julian Hakumin and Philip Phillips. Brother Philip recalls his year at Rokera:

In 1975 I accepted the call to go to Rokera to take the place of Chanel Diki who was to do further studies overseas. The two of us, Bernard Kangku and myself, resided with the parish priest, Father Kloosterman SM. The girls' school was under the control of the DMI sisters and the boys under the Marist Brothers. Bernard replaced Chanel as principal and community leader, while I taught the “Hicks Test” Class, the group which sat the test which was the benchmark for transference to Secondary School. It was a happy and cooperative situation, the priest being responsible for the overall mission, while respecting the autonomy of the school. This had not been so in the previous years as there were differences of opinion between Chanel and Father Kloosterman, often left unresolved.
A re-structuring of primary education in Solomon Islands forced the closure of the primary boarding school at Rokera in 1975. Under the new arrangements primary students would be catered for in the village schools, and all schools would come under the umbrella of the Department of Education, with teachers on Government salaries. There was no place for a boarding school such as Rokera, and reluctantly, the Mission decided to close the school. In November 1975 the school held a feast to farewell the Brothers, and various speakers expressed good wishes and regret that the Brothers were leaving; Bernard Kangku replied movingly. The Marist Brothers departed Rokera and St Peter and Paul School came to an end. Philip Phillips reflects on the closing of the school:

The closing of the boarding school at the end of the year was a sad affair, as it had been an effective school, valued by the community. Our educational success was well demonstrated by the fact that all except one of the senior class pupils gained a place in a secondary school for 1976. It was a Government decision to close all boarding primary schools and nobody could do anything about that. St Peter and Paul School was an important contribution to education on Small Malaita in the early seventies.

**Rokera Provincial Secondary School**

Five years later, at the beginning of 1981, a Provincial Secondary School opened at Rokera, on a site just above the mission property. Recalling the fine contribution the Marist Brothers had made earlier at Rokera, the Education Authorities requested two Brothers as teachers for the new school. While it was not possible to provide these Brothers for the school’s opening year, Brother Chanel Diki, a Solomon Islander, and Brother Kevin Hoare, an Australian, joined the staff in 1982. Chanel became the deputy headmaster, a further sign of confidence in the Brothers.

The new school was a co-educational boarding school, Form One to Form Three, with an enrolment of just over one hundred students. The curriculum was a blend of academic and practical subjects, including English, Mathematics, Agriculture (livestock and cash crops), Home Economics, Business Studies, Crafts and Mechanics. When the Brothers arrived, their house, a semi-permanent structure with iron roofing, sawn-
timber floor and leaf walls, was still under construction, so, like their Rokera predecessors, they resided with the priest, Father Morosini, for some months. Morosini, a Marist priest, was hospitable and supportive of the Brothers.

In a letter in March 1982 Br Chanel describes the early days at Rokera Provincial Secondary School:

The school is still in its pioneering stage. We are still using the mission's classrooms and dining hall while new classrooms, dormitories, dining room, assembly hall and chapel are still in planning. The biggest problem at the moment is shortage of water. I was surprised to be appointed deputy headmaster. Although reluctant at first, I accepted the position after discussions with Kevin and Father Morosini. In addition to my duties as deputy headmaster, I am teaching Mathematics to Forms 1 and 3, looking after the vegetable garden, coordinating the Religious Education and assisting the sports master. Kevin teaches mainly English and Elementary Mechanics. He also takes care of the maintenance around the school.

Kevin's carpentry skills added considerably to the school's facilities as well as providing cupboards and other finishing touches in the Brothers' house. A year after his arrival Kevin suffered a leg injury due to a mishap with a falling water tank. Kevin, with a student's assistance,
was replacing a weak post supporting a thousand-gallon tank when it collapsed, pinning him and the student against the wall of the house until the water drained from the tank. The injury required Kevin's hospitalization for some days in Honiara.

**Of Light and Darkness**

One of the unusual things for expatriates working in Solomon Islands or PNG is the equal day-length throughout the year, twelve hours of light, no twilight and twelve hours of darkness every day. At night, in places without electricity supply, light is supplied by fires or simple lamps where necessary. Local people's facility for moving around and living in conditions of darkness is remarkable. For study purposes many students dislike the bright illumination that westerners require, often preferring to study in conditions of shade or dull light.

Students preparing pressure lamps for night study

In isolated stations like Rokera, small generators, which were prone to frequent breakdowns, provided the lighting. Pressure lamps, which also
required regular maintenance, supplemented the electric lighting as needed. Kevin Hoare, in a letter dated June 1983, explains some of the frustrations:

I sent a request to Honiara to get a couple of parts for our Coleman lamp. I sent in the actual packets that the parts came in. A different part came back, with the message it was the last one in Honiara, but it wouldn't fit. We would still be in the dark if Father hadn't lent us his small portable generator, which I have connected to our lights. I used our spare Coleman parts to keep the school lamps going. Our school generator broke down about two months ago, so the students have been doing their night study by the light of one power lamp per class.

[The generator was finally repaired nine months later.]

Changes and Challenges

At the end of 1983 both Kevin and Chanel moved to Australia, Kevin to update his educational qualifications and Chanel to begin studies for the priesthood in Sydney. Their replacements were Brothers Edwin Meresinihinua, a Solomon Islander, and Gonzaga Nabbs, a newly arrived Australian with thirty years of experience of Junior Secondary teaching. At the same time a new headmaster began his term in charge of Rokera Provincial Secondary School. That year the enrolment exceeded 200 students, the rapidly-increasing population putting further demands on the school’s inadequate water supply system, and further over-crowding the sleeping accommodation. In his report in April 1984, District Superior, Brother Jeffrey Crowe, observed other problems:

One of the results of the overcrowding is the spread of infectious diseases; at times many of the students are out of class, sick. There is no sign of new dormitories for the girls. A further complication for the girls has been the regulation that they stay inside their dormitory after dark, when there is no electricity. There are no recreational facilities and no free space anywhere inside the dorm. In this way the girls bear the burden of being part of a co-educational boarding school and the artificial “controls” which have to be enforced. On sports afternoons you can see healthy young teenage boys in soccer boots jumping up and down on the spot as there is nowhere for them to run around and play a game, because of a dispute about payment for the use of nearby land. The library is practically non-existent. When you add this situation to no wood for the woodwork room and no dress material for the sewing room, a picture emerges of a school struggling to survive.
Some of the problems identified by Jeffrey were addressed over the following years, but many remained. One issue involved the selection process for further education after graduation from the Provincial High Schools. The majority missed out on selection and often considered themselves “failures”, some venting their resulting anger in inappropriate ways. In spite of offerings in agriculture, domestic science and mechanics, the fairly conventional curriculum failed to address this issue adequately.

Life was not all bad on this isolated island paradise. On weekends the students enjoyed fishing from the wharf, diving on the reef or swimming across to nearby islands to fish or gather crabs from the surrounding shallow reefs.

**Cyclone Namu**

On 18 May 1986 Cyclone Namu struck Solomon Islands, with wind speeds in excess of 200 kilometres per hour. Malaita, the country's most populous island, was worst hit, with destruction of complete villages. Across the country more than 100 people lost their lives and about 90,000, one third of the population, were left homeless. Rokera Provincial Secondary School took the full force of the blast, and the resulting damage was extensive, as Gonzaga recalls:

Pentecost Sunday, 18 May 1986, will live in the memories of the people of Malaita as the day Cyclone Namu struck and devastated much of the island. At Rokera Provincial Secondary School we had strong winds and heavy rain for two days before the gale suddenly increased in intensity at 6 p.m. on Sunday. The headmaster suggested to all the staff and their families that they leave their leaf-thatched houses and seek shelter in the library, a more substantial building. At first I was reluctant to move, but immediately on seeing the roof of the boys toilet being lifted and carried a few hundred metres into a gully, I decided to join the group sheltering in one of the dormitories, the library already being crowded with teachers' families. Periodically during the night we heard the crash of the branches as they hit the ground after being snapped off by the gale. Some of the students, as they looked out the door of the dormitory, gave us a ball-by-ball description of what was happening to the school buildings. In the murk I found it difficult to see what damage had actually been caused to the school property. All of us spent a sleepless night listening to the reports of the path of the cyclone on the local radio station and hoping the building in which
we were sheltering would be strong enough to withstand its force. At daybreak the wind abated a little and we were able to survey the damage. Miraculously, no one was injured. We discovered that four of the classrooms had been flattened and two had lost their roofs. Only one classroom was operational. Two staff houses lost their roofs, but, thank God, the Brothers’ house was still intact. Edwin had stayed there throughout the night. Fortunately, all of the dormitories where the students were sheltering suffered no damage and only a few textbooks were destroyed. The students spent several days tidying up the place until the Education Authority closed the school and sent the students home.

Cyclone Damage, Small Malaita, May 1986

Ten days later Edwin wrote to Brother Paul Murphy, headmaster at Tenaru, to ask for some assistance from the young Brothers there, and also to give an update on the Rokera situation after the storm:

Life is suddenly changed here – no student to be seen, no houses, the surrounding countryside is a huge wasteland – terrible! Our house is okay but the roof needs to be nailed down and the water tank has to be erected. I have been working hard mending broken water pipes and restoring the school's water supply. I hope you can send over the two young Brothers to help us with the repairs and clean up.

Paul obliged, in spite of having major clean up work at his own school and elsewhere on Guadalcanal, as he explains:

Namu swept everything away. The whole of the northern side of Guadalcanal became one big river. Selwyn College was completely inundated by water
several metres deep. [Selwyn College was an Anglican High School seven kilometers further east of Tenaru. It has since been relocated to the western end of Guadalcanal, near Visale.] Students and staff there managed to get to the top floor of their only double storey building and thus they were safe, while the river flowed all around them, several kilometres wide. We didn't know their plight - nobody did - because trees had fallen across the road and bridges had been swept away; there was no communication. Right at the height of the cyclone, a Selwyn College student arrived at St Joseph's. I said, “Where are you from?” He replied, “I'm from Selwyn College. I just floated in on a tree. The rest of the students are stranded out there.” So we sounded the alarm as best we could. They were all safely sent into town. Later we went out to try to dig out their college from under the mud. It was like digging an archaeological site. It was very hard, hot work; the mud was like concrete. They were grateful for our assistance in digging out many of their buildings. Because our buildings at St Joseph's were largely intact, we became a distribution centre for the international relief operations. For three weeks we assisted the Australian Air Force who were coming and going with supplies. We organised our students into teams of about twenty or thirty. School continued while we took one class at a time, about thirty students, to assist with the relief work. They'd go to the airport and help unload the planes, and then load up the helicopters to take the food, tents and other supplies out to the people. At the end of it all, after the problem was over, we found we couldn't get the students home because the sea was full of trees. Even the ships coming up couldn't get to the Solomons for about two weeks. They had to bring things in by plane. The air force offered to use their Caribous to fly the students home to their various missions. They asked me to be loadmaster for the trips and we flew the students home in the Caribou planes, which could land on even the smallest strips.

The rebuilding of Rokera School continued slowly, with Government and overseas assistance, over the following two years. The year after the cyclone, Brother Majella Fitzpatrick joined Edwin at Rokera, replacing Gonzaga. Four years previously Majella had arrived in PNG where he taught at Buin High School in Bougainville. An energetic sixty-year-old, Majella had been headmaster of several Australian schools and brought his particular style of Marist dedication, characterized by hard work, unstinting generosity, commitment to promoting religious vocations and unswerving fidelity to his ideals. The two Brothers were challenged by the limitations of their buildings at the school, equipment shortages, and the demands of community life on an isolated mission. Majella elaborates:

I went to Rokera in 1987, just after Cyclone Namu. Since the school had not been rebuilt, we were teaching down at the Catholic mission, where there were
classrooms from the old St Peter and Paul Primary School down at the mission station below our school. This arrangement, although unavoidable, was quite inconvenient. The rooms had no windows, only shutters held out with a stick; so, when it was overcast, it was pretty dark. We'd teach there in the morning then go back to our school at the top of the hill for some classes. I used the dining room for my Grade Nine English and Mathematics classes. There was no equipment, apart from one hammer and a saw. So you couldn't do much by way of practical subjects, apart from a bit of agriculture. I was with Edwin. It was difficult at times. At night I used to supervise the meal and then I was in charge of the boys' dormitory next to the Brothers' house and I used to put the boys to bed. So I didn't see much of Eddie. When the headmaster asked me to show the pictures on Saturday, I said I didn't think it was fair. I said I owed some sort of community life to Eddie. I told Eddie that, so he went off and volunteered to show the pictures! There were some difficult moments but I enjoyed it all the same. I was there for two years only.

Following the pattern of changing both Rokera Brothers simultaneously, the new District Superior, Brother Des Howard, appointed two new Brothers to Rokera in 1989, Bernard Kangku and Julian Quinlan. Bernard and Julian each enjoyed living and working on Malaita for the following two years. They were a good team.

Herman Aruhane, a Rokera student from 1987 to 1989, recalls his school days and the contributions of the last four Brothers on the staff:

When I first arrived, the school was being re-built after the cyclone. I remember Br Majella was a hard-working guy. He maintained the lawnmowers and looked after the maintenance of the water pump, toilets, shower rooms and laundry. Edwin looked after the woodwork area. Later, Bernard Kangku and Julian arrived. Bernard Kangku was an interesting man. He was a great farmer, an excellent gardener. We always had plenty of greens to eat, plenty of local garden food, thanks to Bernard. He was a good teacher too; he took us for Religious Education. Julian taught the final year students. He was a great musician and he did a good job organizing us for drama. I heard there was a big difference after the Brothers left the school. The discipline was not as good because some of the teachers were not as committed as the Brothers were. No one could look after the mowers as well as Majella did. During my time, there were many Rokera students who scored high marks and were able to go on to further studies.

For some time the District Council had considered the closure of Rokera as part of their rationalization of manpower, due to some expatriates
returning to their countries, and the departure of some younger Melanesian Brothers. As well, a new community had opened at Avuavu on the weather coast, increasing the demand for Brothers. For these reasons the community at Rokera was closed at the end of 1990.
Chapter 20

Appropriate Education
Vanga Point
1971-2003

For many years schools in Solomon Islands and most developing countries have struggled with the problem of deciding what to teach their students. What kind of curriculum will help them to prepare for life, in a land where most people essentially maintain a subsistence lifestyle? Even in the twenty-first century, large numbers of children are unable to access formal education; there is a high dropout rate and much frustration when employment is unavailable after years of schooling.

In her book Let Christ Be a Melanesian published in 2003, Papua New Guinean Sister Margaret Mary Maladede FMI makes a controversial though thought-provoking claim: “The main emphasis of formal education was to teach western values rather than reinforcing Melanesian values. Furthermore it prepared young people to get jobs rather than be productive in their own communities. This has disturbed traditional patterns … and brought about grave problems in many areas of Melanesian life.” What is appropriate education for Solomon Islands? Education can be a road to development and a fuller human life, or a subversive westernizing influence, depending on how it is delivered.

Fortunately perhaps, in Solomon Islands and PNG, education has been and, to a large extent, still is provided by the mainline Churches. In spite of clumsy beginnings and occasional cultural mistakes, Church education agencies are strongly committed to “fostering authentic human progress” as Paul VI urged in Populorum Progressio. As one way of seeking to find an appropriate educative process which clearly promoted Melanesian values, the Dominican Bishop of Gizo, Solomon Islands, Eusebius Crawford, planned to establish a vocational school for Year Seven leavers in his Western Solomons Vicariate. This was in line with
his belief that education was the key to localisation and development in Western Solomons.

The Beginning of St Dominic's Mission School

When Bishop Crawford asked the Marist Brothers' Sydney Provincial, Brother Othmar Weldon, to supply Brothers for his project, Othmar called for volunteers to begin such a mission. Among the first to respond was Brother Berchmans Murray (later Brother Kevin) who was, at the time, teaching at St Joseph's Rigu, on nearby Bougainville Island. Othmar sought his assistance, as Berchmans explains:

Othmar wrote to me at Rigu and asked me if I could reconnoitre suitable sites in Western Solomons for the establishment of the new training Centre. Accompanied by Brother Vivian Robertson, I crossed the border from Bougainville and took a canoe powered by outboard motor to the Shortland Islands, where we stayed at the Mission Station at the invitation of Father Cyril O'Grady and inspected likely sites for the school. Unanimously we decided that any places available here were not suitable for our purpose. We needed a large farming area, with fertile soil, good water supply and preferably ready-made accommodation. We then travelled over to Moli Island, a small island off the south coast of Choiseul, where there was a well-established mission. Again, the necessary components for a vocational centre were absent. Father Cyril then recommended that we look at Kolombangara, where Mr Brian O'Keefe, a friend of the Mission, ran a saw milling operation at Mongga. His lease was expiring and he wanted to leave. The location was ideal: plenty of water, good soil, some cleared land and adequate buildings. Twenty-one head of cattle, some pigs, rail line and trolley, were included in the purchase. The Mission arranged a new lease, and the name was changed to Vanga Point, as the original name had an obscene meaning in the local language.

In early January 1971 Berchmans returned to Vanga via Gizo, the main centre of Western Solomons, from where he was accompanied by Brian O'Keefe who was in the final stages of moving out. Berchmans took advantage of Brian's local knowledge and advice during the few days he spent with him. Meanwhile, the students of the new school began to arrive.

Brother Faber Turnbull became the founding principal of the school, joining Berchmans at Vanga Point on 29 January 1971. Two weeks later, two Dominican Sisters, Philomena and Michael, arrived, together
with the first of the girls, followed shortly after by the chaplain, Father Ian Waite OP. These five staff, with their thirty-five charges, twenty boys and fifteen girls, launched St Dominic's Mission School. Faber explained his own understanding of the purpose of the school in his first report to the Australian Marist periodical, *Marist Monthly*, in April 1971:

Our object is unique for mission schools. It is to train our students for improving their village life. We teach the essentials of the school curriculum (English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Civics and Religious Education), with a practical knowledge of village craft, gardening, carpentry and whatever else might fit them for a more comfortable and happy life in their villages. We aim to develop in the students self-reliance, leadership skills and community responsibility.

Berchmans, who had good skills in mechanics and building, explains how this vision of the school's purpose guided his teaching of practical subjects:
The Bishop, right from the start, had in mind to teach practical skills to these youngsters, having firmly in mind that they would return to their respective villages to put their talents into action. Consequently, in those early days at Vanga Point, we continually reminded the lads of why they were temporarily away from their homes and that they should not forget that on completion of their course, they should return to help their village development. In the seventies, we often visited the villages, travelling in the mission ship Dominic to distant places, and by canoe with outboard motor to places in the vicinity of the training centre.

First Staff of St Dominic's Mission School, 1971:
Brother Berchmans (Kevin) Murray, Sister Philomena, Father Ian Waite, Sister Michael, Brother Faber Turnbull

From the beginning, this approach underpinned St Dominic's plan of action, which was gradually translated into a curriculum and an educational philosophy which responded to the needs of the islanders, and established the Centre as one of the leading vocational schools in the country. In short, “appropriate education” has always been a hallmark of St Dominic's Rural Training Centre.
The first months at Vanga Point were difficult, by any measure. Inadequate buildings, constant shortages, communication problems, crop failures, extreme isolation and the sudden death of the Choiseul student, Emma Podomuzi, from cerebral malaria, contributed to the hardships of the first staff. The boats bringing mail from home were eagerly awaited and visitors were welcomed. One early visitor from Sydney was Brother Kelvin Canavan, who, after visiting Tenaru, spent some days at Vanga Point. Faber describes an eventful fishing trip:

We were delighted to welcome Brother Kelvin whom we took trawling in our dinghy on Saturday afternoon. Not that trawling is particularly exciting, but it would seem that on this particular afternoon, our Devil-Thing had a brand of entertainment of his own to provide. The birds, diving and splashing over a school of agitated fish pointed out the place, and although our six horsepower outboard is a little slow for this type of fishing we were soon amongst them. Our delighted visitor soon discovered that there are all kinds of fish here. The first (and last) bite was sharp and he suddenly found what seemed to be a ton of lead on his line. To his awful consternation, he very soon saw that he was trying to heave a very large shark towards the boat! Although it would not be accurate to say that our guest lost interest in subsequent proceedings, he certainly was quick to detach himself from further part in same - apart from giving some helpful advice like “Cut the line!” or “Let it go!” or “Get rid of it!” Meanwhile we were circling around, hopelessly tangling up the second line and trying to get the shark a little closer. Finding it too big to pull on board, we towed it a couple of miles to beach it. It was a whaler, well over six feet in length. The Gilbertese boys had a delicious feast for the next few days. I hope Brother's heart returned to normal! Perhaps he was not as sorry about his departure as we were!

Other visitors during 1971 included two friends of Berchmans from Griffith, Australia, Les Kubank and Charles Sharrom, who, over five weeks, assisted with building a large steel-framed building which housed two classrooms and a spacious assembly area. This generous involvement of overseas and local helpers has always been a feature of the Brothers' work, both in Solomon Islands and in Papua New Guinea.

In 1972, pre-empting Brother Pat Howley's Kairiru Experiment (see Chapter 16) by several years, the staff implemented a system of committees for organizing the operation of the school. From the Annals of March 1972:
Our programme has been completely reorganized in order to give the students more responsibility through a Community Council and five committees: Public Works, Recreation, Finance, Red Cross and Judiciary. There is now very little academic work; two English periods and an Art period per week are the only formal school lessons, the rest of the time being taken up with practical training in Agriculture, Mechanics and Woodwork for the boys; Home Science, Mother Craft and Sewing for the girls. The various committees meet on Friday evenings and the Community Council on Monday evenings. The idea is to set up our Centre along the lines of a model village, and we hope it will accomplish more successfully the purpose of this mission.

With an increased enrolment of forty students in 1973, two local teachers were added to the staff, William Sotobatu and John Hani. It was to be Faber's last year at Vanga. The final entry in his splendidly-written Annals covering his period at Vanga paid tribute to his companion Berchmans, and to the generosity of Brothers in Australia who had supported the mission. Brother Ivor Madigan from Sydney, who had been particularly generous in raising funds for Vanga and arranging the shipment of all kinds of materials, received special mention. Faber worked in Australia for some years before returning to Papua New Guinea in 1982. His contribution at Vanga Point, Wewak, Tenaru and Sixteen Mile over a total of twenty-two years was characterised by generosity and fidelity in the face of difficulties. Aged eighty-two, he completed his long service in the District of PNG/SI at the end of 2003 and returned to Australia.

A New Principal - Brother Frank McMahon

Son of a storekeeper in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, Australia, Frank McMahon brought his own down-to-earth style of leadership to the school at Vanga. He completed an eleven-year term at St Joseph's College Hunters Hill, Australia at the end of 1973, a different world from Kolombangara. At St Joseph's, he had the prestigious tasks of coaching the College's First XV rugby football team, and commanding the Cadet Unit. His educational style was exemplified by his decision to dispense with many of the exclusively military aspects of cadets, such as long periods of drill and weapons training, replacing them with outdoor activities such as canoeing, abseiling and orienteering, designed
to build self-confidence in the students. His appointment to Vanga heralded a new era and a significant period of development at the Centre.

Always a man of action, Frank, within days of his arrival, had drawn up extensive lists of “urgent projects” and “other needs”, an agenda for a meeting with the Bishop, and a further list of points for discussion with the Sisters. Most of his plans became reality over the following months, as Frank took on the task with gusto.

Through his identification of needs and his creative approach to solving problems, Frank began a fine tradition of implementing interesting and relevant experimental curricula at Vanga. Examples of courses introduced in 1974 include water reticulation, latrine construction, canoe building, methane gas production, elementary bookkeeping, first-aid and hygiene. The two-year programme was organised into self-contained units of work.

Another addition to the Brothers' community in 1974 was Brother Edwin Meresinihinua, transferred from Kieta. Edwin, being a Solomon Islander, took on the essential role of liaising with the local communities, and assisting the expatriate Brothers in understanding Solomon Islands culture. No stranger to the problem of living between two cultures himself, Edwin adapted easily to living with the two Australians, and enjoyed teaching in the school over the following five years. He took charge of woodwork classes, sport and supplying the locally available building materials – sand, gravel and timber. The latter task caused him some headaches, as Frank McMahon explains:

We had a little difficulty in finding the right kind of timber for the flooring of the new house for the girls. After visiting a village about one hour's trip away, we were informed that this timber was growing on the mountain behind the village. Edwin set sail with a group of boys and, on arrival at the village, found he had one and a half hour's walk ahead of him, cutting a track up the mountain as he went. They cut enough timber for about half the floor, and then lugged some of these logs back to the boat. On the following days, when they returned to collect the remaining logs, Berchmans and I found that we were VERY busy and couldn't possibly go along. We have decided the next house will have a concrete floor – hang the expense.
Uncertain Future

During 1974, discussions were held about the future of the Centre, arising from concerns that new Government policies might force the closure of the school. Ultimately, the Education Department decided that St Dominic's was already fulfilling all the Department's objectives in educating students to return to their villages. There were other discussions about the impact of proposed Government funding and about the restriction and changes that such funding might bring. Another issue was the future of the girls' programme at Vanga. The Dominican Sisters were concerned about the relatively small number of girls enrolled, and investigated other approaches to providing girls' vocational training. The minutes of the newly formed Vanga Point School Board's meeting of May 1974 indicated a preference for a continuation of the girls' section at Vanga, although, from the beginning, there had been a history of difficulties arising from the boys and girls living and working in close proximity. About that time, the Sisters decided to transfer the girls' section to Nila (Shortland Islands, near Bougainville) at the end of the year. Frank had mixed reactions to the decision:

While the girls' departure will solve some problems for us, it will raise others: how to replace the good influence the Sisters had on the boys; how to provide the boys with social contact with girls of their age; how will we do the washing, ironing and cooking!

In July 1974 disaster struck when the Sisters' house burned to the ground. Frank McMahon describes the scene:

At about 1.00 a.m. this morning, Berchmans was awakened by the sound of a fire and rushed outside to find the Sisters' house well and truly ablaze. We just had time to disconnect the large gas bottle and roll it away before the whole house went up. Nothing could be done to save it. Fortunately the Sisters are away and no one was harmed but they lost everything in the house. Our only stove, most of the cooking pots and the kerosene deep freeze were completely destroyed. At a time when we are battling to get new buildings up, this is a big blow, especially as it was the best house we had. It was almost certainly started by some fault in the kerosene freezer unit.
Partly as a result of this disaster, the Sisters and girls did not return to Vanga after the mid-year vacation in 1974. The Sisters remained in the Shortlands, working with women and girls in the villages, and assisting at the school on Nila.

For about five years from 1974, Lever Brothers Company, which had a logging lease on Kolombangara, carried out operations on and around St Dominic's campus. A new road was built through the school property to allow movement of machinery and timber. The constant noise of machines, the movement of barges and logging trucks and the presence of workers were disruptions the school had to live with during those years. About mid-1979, having logged the area around the school, the company moved its operation to another part of the island, to the relief of all at the Centre. One legacy of the logging was a seventy-kilometre stretch of road, leading from St Dominic's to Ringi Cove on the other side of the island.

The enrolment at the beginning of 1975 was forty-three students. The long awaited cool-room and butchery were completed, and a new dining room and kitchen block begun. A dark cloud hung briefly over the future of St Dominic's when the Department of Education's Western Education Board decided in May 1975 to locate a new secondary school at Vanga Point to begin in 1976. Under financial and political pressure, Bishop Crawford had offered the Vanga Point site for the new school. The secondary school would involve a complete change of direction for Vanga, and threw into doubt the future involvement of Marist Brothers. Two months later, the Education Board decided instead to locate the new school on nearby Vella Lavella Island, where, unlike Vanga, suitable facilities already existed. This new decision enabled Vanga to continue
as a Rural Training Centre. The Brothers and their friend and supporter, Catholic Education Secretary, Father Cyril O'Grady, heaved a sigh of relief, although they were concerned at the loss of Government funding for Rural Training Centres as a result of the restructuring.

In 1976 the concept of “model farms” was further developed. Each group of second years was assigned an acre (0.4 hectares) of land which the students used to plant crops for sale; they built chicken and pig pens and raised a heifer. Students could use the money earned to set up their own village projects on their return. The model farms became a feature of St Dominic's over the following years, continuing into the twenty-first century.

In 1974 the Marist Brothers in Australia provided funds for the purchase of a second-hand bulldozer, which proved useful for many purposes. In 1976, to assist with funds to run the school, the Brothers leased the bulldozer to various groups who transported it to different parts of Western Solomons by barge. In May 1976 the Seventh Day Adventist mission hired the dozer to assist with construction of an airfield on New Georgia and arrived with their barge to transport the dozer. During
the crossing, a heavy sea was running, the towline to the barge broke and the barge rolled violently, shifting the dozer. The result was that the seas came in over the front end of the barge, and dozer and barge sank to the bottom of the ocean. Some months later, compensation of $5,000 was agreed upon.

**Overseas Friends**

At the end of 1976, the Brothers were happy to welcome a good friend and hard-working fundraiser from Australia, Brother Ivor Madigan, who was keen to visit the mission on behalf of which he had raised significant amounts of money since its inception. “Early in December we were very pleased to welcome Brother Ivor, the top benefactor of Vanga,” observed Frank. “There were many late nights playing cards while he was here.” Another generous benefactor in the early days was the Marist school in Recklinghausen, Germany. As well as sending funds, the Recklinghausen students wrote to Vanga over a period of several years. During his renewal time in Europe in 1977, Frank visited the school, showed Brother Des Murphy's film about Vanga Point, and spoke to the students. Major donors for buildings included Misereor in Germany and Freedom from Hunger in Australia.

During these years, the Brothers, particularly Berchmans, regularly travelled on the mission boats around the Western Region, visiting ex-students to encourage and assist them with their village projects, canvassing future enrolments and assisting remote villages as needed, and listening to their suggestions for developments at St Dominic's. On a few occasions, the Brothers and staff organised short practical courses for adults at Vanga.

1977 opened with a record enrolment of sixty-one students. While Frank travelled to Europe to participate in the Marist renewal programme in the second half of that year, Brother Oliver Wilmot arrived from Australia to assist at Vanga. The ancient art of soap-making was introduced into the syllabus, lard from the slaughtering of cattle providing the main ingredient. As years went by, soap-making became more sophisticated with the addition of simple cosmetics and perfumes, using coconut oil
as another major ingredient. 1977 was the year that Frank was determined to set up his pet project of a hydro-electricity system for the school. In spite of his efforts over several years and advice from numerous experts, the plan was never really successful because of the unsuitability of the river and surrounding terrain for such a project.

A new staff member in 1978 was Brother Roch Tanahan, a Buka man from North Solomons Province, Papua New Guinea. He completed his initial formation in Fiji, then spent a brief time at Kieta, Bougainville, before being transferred to Vanga Point at the beginning of 1978. There he played a big part in establishing a cocoa plantation and assisted with the pig and chicken projects. After one year at Vanga Point he went to Sydney where he did technical studies (mechanics). He left the congregation soon after completing the course in Australia and returned to Bougainville where he died unexpectedly of a heart attack around 1990, aged about forty.

**Kevin and Edwin Move On**

At the end of 1978, Kevin Murray (referred to previously in this chapter as Berchmans Murray) had completed eight years at Vanga Point. Having successfully launched the Centre, he felt the need for a break from the isolated mission life and returned to Australia for some years, before returning to Vanga in 1983. Although Frank and Kevin had occasional differences of opinion and were both strong, independent men, Frank missed Kevin's companionship and expertise in the diverse aspects of the work at Vanga. In his annual report of 1978, Frank paid the following tribute to Kevin:

> Brother Kevin, our pioneer, came here in 1971, carved the pastures and gardens out of the bush and coped with all kinds of difficulties. His outstanding quality, that you all know well, is his determination to keep going, regardless of setbacks. He sought out new skills and constantly adapted his courses to match your needs in the villages. He left behind a thriving cattle herd, excellent pasture fenced and grassed, a piggery that produces 120 piglets a year, a flourishing chicken run, etc. He did excellent follow-up work with ex-students and others in the villages. Above all, he is a man of prayer. I could go on all night talking of what Kevin has achieved here, but we all know it well and we thank him very sincerely for the eight hard years he spent building up this Centre. We will all miss this strong, kind, prayerful man.
Brother Edwin, after five years at Vanga, also left at the end of 1978, to undertake a Marist renewal course in Switzerland, leaving Frank as the only continuing Brother on the staff in 1979. The new members joining him were Brother Jack Gelli, a Solomon Islander recently professed at the Fiji novitiate, and an Australian, Brother Michael Jones. The Centre's enrolment increased to about seventy students. Early in 1978, work began on the construction of a new chapel and a new house for the Brothers. Brother Bertrand Webster, who had been appointed coordinator of the Brothers in Solomon Islands and Bougainville, spent some months at Vanga Point in the latter part of 1979, and was the first Brother to move into the Brothers' house. “The rest of us are biding our time,” wrote Frank, “while Bertrand gives us on-the-spot reports as to what it is like there.” The chapel was not finished until the following year, 1980.

Unlike its predecessor, the chapel was a permanent structure. “When it rained, we couldn't find a dry spot in the old chapel where the rain did not come through on us,” Frank lamented about the earlier building, with its weathered sago-leaf roof. 1980 was Frank McMahon's final year at Vanga Point. In his five years as principal, he achieved much, setting the school on a solid foundation, with a clear vision of its mission. Michael Jones, Frank's companion during his final years at Vanga, reminisces about him:

Frank was tenacious. He was very hard working and the buildings still in use at Vanga testify to his energy. Towards the end of his time, he was concerned to complete the Brothers' house and the chapel, which he did. He was always the builder. His primary concern was always the welfare of the school. He was full-on with his tasks, trying to make St Dominic's the best place it could be.
Frank's approach may at times have been like his bulldozer, but he never, at any time, sank beneath the waves. His passion, zest for getting the job done, and unlimited energy went hand in hand with an engaging personality that enabled him to relate to anyone. He worked for three years at St Joseph's Tenaru before returning to Australia where he helped to set up a rural training programme for unemployed youth in Toowoomba, Queensland. He returned to the District in 1991, and worked at Sixteen Mile, PNG, where he died later that year.

Later Years at Vanga Point

Following Brother Frank McMahon, the new principal, Brother Bernard McGrath brought different gifts and a new style of leadership to Vanga Point. Having completed ten years of teaching and administration in Australian schools, Bernard arrived in the Solomons on New Year's Day in 1981, accompanied by Brother Sevard Forster. Frank, who was headed for Tenaru in 1981, stayed on for a month to help the two new Brothers settle in to the place. St Dominic's Rural Training Centre maintained its enrolment at around eighty students, with three Brothers and a local teacher as staff. At that time a retired Redemptorist Priest, Father Vince Page CSsR, was the resident chaplain.

The school continued with much the same curriculum; the practical work was based on cattle, pigs, chickens, agriculture, carpentry and mechanics, while the theory work, usually restricted to one or two periods per day, covered basic Mathematics, English, Accounting Principles and Religious Education. The staff further refined the idea of “model farms”, introduced in the early years of St Dominic's, and encouraged the second year students to work on small-scale projects which they operated as a business. Skills learned through this scheme could easily be applied at home in the villages.
In 1983 Brother Max Middleton began his first appointment at Vanga, and pioneer staff member, Brother Kevin Murray, also returned to St Dominic's. This formidable team, with a wide range of practical skills, further enhanced the reputation of St Dominic's. They continued the tradition of extended visits to ex-students, near and far, to advise and encourage them in their projects. Sometimes travelling together, sometimes alone, the Brothers spent many days visiting villages, working alongside the grassroots people, often staying for some days, familiarizing themselves with the problems of village agriculture in order to refine and improve St Dominic's courses. The fundamental aim of Vanga was always to teach skills relevant to the rural environment to which the students would return. Bernard McGrath completed his term as headmaster at the end of 1986. District Superior Jeffrey Crowe wrote in the District Newsletter of November 1986:

If Frank McMahon's time at Vanga was characterised by physical exertion and construction, Bernie's era bears the mark of thoroughness and perseverance. The continuing appeal of Vanga as a site for non-formal education is due to Bernie's care to strengthen the courses being offered and to provide a steady management of the Centre's resources. Along with Kev Murray, Mick Jones, Sevard and Max, Bernie has consolidated the work of the Brothers into a mature institution, a real strength for the people of Solomon Islands.

Brother Terry Tanzer followed Bernard McGrath as headmaster of Vanga Point, while Brother Melchior Jalowa, a Papua New Guinean Brother from the Sepik, also arrived in 1987 and served at Vanga for three years. Terry continued and expanded the system of using “instructors” who were themselves graduates of Vanga. After a period as “trainee instructors” these young men developed sufficient skills to be able to pass on what they themselves had learned. This method of formation of vocational teachers proved so successful that it continued for many years, later leading to the implementation of the “Rural Studies Instructor Certificate” course and, ultimately, the establishment of the Training College for vocational teachers, built on the campus with assistance from the European Union, from 2002.

Throughout the history of St Dominic's, the teachers experimented with various innovative projects, simple enough for application in rural settings but designed to produce a small income for enterprising
Relaxing after a long day: Brothers Sevard, Terry and Max, 1987

students. At different times students learned how to make charcoal, weave fishnets, manufacture oil and soap, repair sewing machines, maintain beehives, build cement tanks and make perfumes. The crocodile farm and fresh-water fish farm were other initiatives begun around the late 1980s. Later an “integrated farm” was established, designed to teach students ecologically sustainable farming methods.

During the course of the year students and staff participated in a range of different activities outside the usual class routine. From its earliest years St Dominic's offered short courses to the wider community at various times. Often the students were able to assist with aspects of these courses. Successful programmes were organised for parents, villagers, and women's groups. An annual highlight was the “Open Day”, where the achievements of the school were showcased for the benefit of parents, significant people from Government and donor
agencies, and the general public. A huge lunch, prepared by the boys, was followed by entertainment and the inevitable speeches of welcome and responses by dignitaries. For a few years the annual “adventure weekend” provided an interesting and challenging diversion for students and some staff. Activities for these weekends included walking around Kolombangara Island, climbing the mountain, paddling around the island and exploring the island's rivers. Life at Vanga was never dull!

In 1992 Brother Paul O'Brien began as principal of Vanga. In the same year Solomon Islander Brother Severino Lausao joined the staff and stayed for five years. In 1994 Brother Jack Kalisto, who was to become St Dominic's first national headmaster, arrived. Brother Peter Morellini followed Paul O'Brien as principal in 1994, while Jack Kalisto served with Peter as “co-principal” for a time, until Jack took over at the beginning of 1997.

Sevard Forster worked at Vanga Point for fourteen years, returning to Australia in October 1994 because of deteriorating health. He died just a few months later, in April 1995, at Campbelltown, aged seventy-seven. Always a practical outdoor man, Sevard slotted easily into life at Vanga Point. The time he spent in Solomon Islands was a fitting and satisfying conclusion to his long life as a committed Marist. “His many gifts, generous service and fine example have been an enormous contribution to the life of St Dominic's and to the education of many young Solomon Islanders. Vanga will never be the same.” (District Superior Ray Arthur, writing in the District Newsletter of October 1994)

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations for St Dominic's occurred in 1996. Guests of honour included founding principal Brother Faber Turnbull and founding staff member Sister Michael OP (later Philippa), together with two of the founding class from 1971, Dominican Sisters Rita Pitavaverie and Anastasia Arae.

In 1997 Brother Anthony Burrows joined the staff, followed later by Brothers Mark Poro and Bruce Nabbs (formerly Gonzaga). Anthony Burrows later became principal of St Dominic's.
The foundation of Vanga Point Rural Teachers' Training College in 2002 marked the beginning of another phase in the development of Vanga Point. While it was administratively separate from St Dominic's, its proximity to this fully operational Rural Training Centre had many advantages for the twenty student teachers at the College.

In its short history, St Dominic's has achieved much by way of providing appropriate education for many young Solomon Islanders. Acclaimed by all as one of the leading Rural Training Centres in the country, the school continues to be a popular choice for school leavers. Regrettably, only a small proportion of applicants can be accommodated. In a struggling country emerging from a difficult period of its history, St Dominic's Vanga Point is a sign of hope and a clear example of Marist work at its best.
Following the tensions of the Aruligo decisions and the amalgamation of St Paul's and St Joseph's on the Tenaru site (see Chapter 17), the new school progressed well, with its bigger staff, higher enrolment and full complement of secondary classes. The new headmaster in 1975 was Brother Jeffrey Crowe who arrived in Solomon Islands in 1973 and was Father Kelly's deputy headmaster in 1974. Youthful, intelligent, energetic and adaptable, Jeff led the school well for the following four years.

**School Curriculum**

Prior to independence, the school followed the Cambridge Syllabuses from the United Kingdom, Solomon Islands being a British Colony until 1978. In spite of the imported programmes, teachers made efforts to adapt the courses to the needs of Solomon Island students.

On the wider educational scene in Solomon Islands, curriculum ideas developed rapidly around the time of independence. Stimulated by an Education Department document titled *Education for What?*, a powerful statement written in the early 1970s by the Secretary of Education, teachers and administrators recognized that the British Cambridge courses were not suitable and drop-out rates were unacceptably high. Educational thinkers realised that a homegrown education system would better serve the emerging nation. The resulting changes included the introduction of Form VI as an extra year of secondary, and the development of rural secondary schools following an adapted curriculum with a strong emphasis on skills for rural living. The Solomon Islands Teacher Training School took on an expanded role to prepare secondary as well as primary teachers. Significantly, a break was made with
St Joseph's Secondary School: Tenaru

Cambridge and the Solomon Islands School Certificate was established. These changes, referred to in earlier chapters, impacted on the Brothers' work at both Tenaru and Rokera.

The new curricula were designed, written and implemented by practising teachers, including some Tenaru staff. These highly motivated educators produced materials which were innovative and relevant to Solomon Islanders. Brother Paul Murphy describes his involvement with the development of a syllabus in Agriculture:

> When the elementary school phased out at Tenaru, I taught Mathematics and English in secondary. In 1975 Jeff thought we should be doing some agriculture, so he asked me to devise a programme. I made up some units and from that small beginning arose the whole agricultural input for all the schools in Solomon Islands. I was the chairman of the Agriculture Panel for the Education Department for about five years until it was localised. We started a cocoa project and introduced some units on raising cattle. We had a big herd at Tenaru, 200 head of cattle, one of the biggest herds on the island. The Education Minister visited our Open Day in 1976, where we had our agriculture displays and was quite amazed at what our students were achieving in agriculture. I believe that visit inspired him to move towards introduction of agriculture programmes in all high schools. From there, we worked on developing programmes for all grades and by 1980 Agriculture became a subject in the Higher School Certificate.

Besides Paul's agriculture, Tenaru staff developed other practical subjects including woodwork and home science. It was hard work, but exhilarating as well, because the teachers participated enthusiastically in these educational developments which were part of the nation-building experience of training a competent local workforce.

Catechetical Work of Brothers Des Murphy and Peter Page

In 1975 Brother Des Murphy arrived at Tenaru, after teaching mainly in primary schools in Australia where his creative educational methods and personable style were much respected. Des's vocation followed on that of his uncle, Brother Canice O'Donnell, and his elder brother, Bernard (Brother Bernard Murphy). On arrival in Solomon Islands Des worked at Nazareth Apostolic Centre (NAC), a nearby catechetical school which trained Church workers and future seminarians. Writing
for the *Marist Monthly* some months after his arrival, Des gives some early impressions, typical of many newly arrived expatriates, yet with a sharp perception of the issues facing the emerging society and Church of Solomon Islands in the mid 70s:

It's a new experience: teaching students who follow every move and every word, who seem to hang onto every phrase of distilled wisdom. After my recent years in a “with-it” experimental primary school, I find the quietness of the students almost unnerving. Yet I think I'll learn to live with it. My students at NAC are a fascinating lot, ranging from seventeen to forty-seven years of age, with varied educational backgrounds. Our fundamental aim is to upgrade the training of the catechists. People here are grappling with the problems of a developing society in a critical stage of its growth and facing many challenges. There is a great spirit of cohesion and cooperation among all ranks of Church personnel, most of whom have a broad vision and work with a sense of urgency as they strive to make the Church a vibrant part of this emerging society.

The subjects taught at the Centre included Scripture, Church History, Social Justice and Catechetics, English being the language of instruction. Des relates his early efforts to familiarise himself with Solomon Islands' culture:

I recall grabbing the opportunity to know the terrain in the mid-year holiday of 1975. I spent a few weeks at Tarapaina in South Malaita, where Father Kamilo Teke was pastor. He was most obliging in many ways and took me on various patrols to blood me in the real life of a bush missionary. It was my first time to sleep in villages, to communicate in pidgin which I had made a priority early, to tramp, slush, slip and slide along the rough tracks of Malaita and experience some of the culture. The Rokera Brothers welcomed me warmly and I enjoyed meeting and “storying” with the Dutch, American, Irish, Kiwi and English missionaries I met as I moved up the coast from Tarapaina to Ata'a and Takwa. I was lucky the day after I arrived at Takwa the bishop came for his pastoral visit, thus providing me with an easy means of returning to Honiara on the mission boat.

There are several tales in PNG/SI Marist folklore about Brothers assisting with the birth of infants. One of these stories was immortalized when, at an assembly of Brothers in Sydney in the 1980s, a *Playback Theatre* group dramatized Brother Michael Jones' description of such an event. Brother Des relates a similar experience, recorded in the *Marist Monthly* of November 1976:
It all began quietly enough after midnight with an urgent voice calling to me from outside. I thought it was one of our students whose wife was extremely pregnant. Diving out of bed, I was expecting a dash to Honiara hospital. Nothing so prosaic. In fact it was a stranger who had come in from the bush, but I had guessed correctly about the pregnant wife. “My wife is having a baby. You’re a white man, you know about these things. You take her to hospital.”

It was only about a ten-minute trip in our car along a rough bush track to his house, one of the World War II ammunition storage sheds. As we approached, I could hear the baby crying and breathed a prayer of relief at that. By custom, men from his area have nothing to do with childbirth; so a little girl led me a short distance into the long grass where a small fire was burning in a clearing. Nearby were the young mother and the baby. There were women in attendance, but they seemed flustered, as the mother was moaning and seemed in a bad way. The umbilical cord had not been cut. In a daze I made my way back to the car, jolted back to the Centre to pick up all those things any experienced TV watcher knows are essential in such a situation: boiling water, towels, bandages and scissors. In a moment of inspiration, I asked Philomena, our cook girl, to accompany me. A sensible person with a command of several languages, she would be able to assist. We rushed back to find the situation hadn’t changed much. I had a terrible feeling the woman might die. We got organised, tied two tourniquets on the cord, and then with rock calm hand, Doctor Des sheared through the cord. We wrapped the baby in a towel and Philomena took control there. Now, how to get this poor woman to the car! She actually stood up, struggled along a few paces, rested briefly, moaning all the while. Eventually, with the help of the women, she reached the car where she lay on the back seat.

The twenty-kilometre dash to hospital wasn’t too rough with our fragile cargo. There was no stretcher available, so the woman walked into the outpatients’ section, led by a nurse. For about an hour, I strolled up and down outside, like some vaguely expectant father, praying that the woman would be all right. I had no fears about the baby. She had taken on the world out there in the dirt and the darkness and was determined to live. When the nurse and Philomena eventually appeared, they seemed satisfied the mother would be all right. She’d lost a lot of blood and there had been some complications but all would be well. It was nearly 4.00 a.m. when, in a turmoil of thoughts and feelings, we got back to the Centre.

In 1976 Brother Chanel Diki, fresh from a course at National Pastoral Institute in Melbourne, Australia, joined Des at NAC where he taught with verve for some years. When Des’s contract with NAC ended in 1979, he offered his services in assisting teachers with religious Education. This task entailed much travel around the isolated schools of the Diocese, working mainly with primary school teachers. By this
time, the Government of newly independent Solomon Islands had taken over responsibility for primary education; religion lessons were reduced to two per week, taught by Catholic teachers with little support from the Church. Des's new role, a much-needed response to that situation, provided some interesting challenges, as he describes in this extract from the *Marist Monthly* of May 1980:

In the last two months I've visited seventy schools, scattered up and down the coast and in the bush of Guadalcanal and Malaita, loaded with a swag of books and a fine R.E. programme. Communication and transport are real problems. There are some roads, but they are scarce and tend to peter out. Recently I took my Honda motor bike on a mission boat, headed to Marau Sound, visited schools there, then on the Honda, loaded to the point of instability with a wire basket of resources on the back, I headed off along the track. It was hazardous enough, dodging pigs, evading dogs in hot pursuit, swerving to miss chickens, squawking and running erratically right into my path. The worst part was the track itself, potholed and crossing numerous rivers. About 5.00 p.m. that first day, I reached the next mission station, having visited just two bush schools. On South Malaita I travelled by outboard canoe up creeks and rivers and along the coast to reach small bush schools of two or three teachers. As far as the Government is concerned, my visits to these schools are unofficial. However, I've kept good relationships with the key people and, while they can't give official blessing, they are not obstructive. In fact, they realise that this initiative is a considerable help to teachers trying to teach R.E. It all sounds a bit of a romp, this outdoor life spiked with adventure. It does have its drawbacks: living out of a kitbag for weeks at a time, chugging around with a minor spill or two in the wet, pitching around on a boat on the inter-island crossings, plus a bout of malaria which hung on for a week. It's always good to get home and be with the community and rest for a few days before the next sortie.

Des continued in this role for two years until 1981 when he undertook a renewal programme and some further studies. In 1985, Des returned to the District for one year, first to Tenaru, then to Wewak where he assisted Brother Terry Kane in Religious Education support in schools in the Wewak Diocese. In 1986 and 1987 he served as Master of Scholastics at the newly opened community in Madang, and was also the head of the Religious Studies Department at Divine Word Institute. Des completed his work in the District at the end of 1987, an outstanding contribution to Marist life and work in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.
One of Des's contributions in the Solomon Islands was the production of movie films of major events.

Later Brother Peter Page took over the Des's Religious Education role in the Diocese, arriving in the Solomons towards the end of 1985 after studying overseas. He continued the work that Des Murphy had begun years before, visiting schools and supporting teachers through providing resources and in-service, including a national workshop for more than 100 teachers held at Tenaru in December 1988, at which Brother Herman Boyek was a guest lecturer. One feature of his work was the monthly publication of *Emmaus Road*, a popular newspaper-style production which featured teaching notes for religion lessons, background articles and news of teachers and R.E. activities from around the country. On completion of his contract with Catholic Education at the end of 1990, Peter joined the staff of St Joseph's High School Tenaru.

**An Epic Adventure – Circumnavigating Malaita**

In 1976, Brother Paul Murphy, with three friends, travelled by boat around the island of Malaita to visit families of students. He describes the trip:

> I wanted to meet the families of our Malaita students so I convinced Father Norm Arkwright and two experienced students, Tom Koeni and Tony Wale, to
accompany me on a three-week trip in a dugout canoe around the island of Malaita, a distance of more than 500 kilometres, visiting the villages of our students on the way. We had only a small nine horsepower engine to drive our heavy dugout canoe. Setting out from Buma, we headed south following the west coast of Malaita, through the Are'are Lagoon, stopping at villages to visit our students. They were really delighted to see us. Taking turns to drive the canoe, we sailed through the Maramasike Passage between North and South Malaita and up to Tarapaina where we loaded up with another twenty-five gallons of fuel. Each night we stayed with different students; the following morning Father Norm would say Mass and we'd be off again.

Eventually we nosed out into the open sea, on the east side of Malaita, where at times the waves were high as a house. Twelve days into our journey, as we were approaching Ataa Mission, we couldn't find the entrance to the reef, which we knew was only a few metres wide. It was late afternoon, the Ara [south-east wind] was blowing and the seas were breaking over the entire reef. It was impossible to see where the entrance was. Frustratingly, we could see our destination for the night, Ataa Mission Station, up on the hill. As the sun set, rain began to fall, the sea turned grey, and the waves intensified. Simultaneously
sensing there was something big developing out to sea, we all looked around in
time to see a mountain of a wave heading straight for us, about to break. In
searching for the channel, we had drifted in closer and closer to the reef where
the waves were breaking, without realising the danger. This rogue wave was
bearing down on us, threatening to sweep us to death. Fortunately, Tony Wale,
a Langalanga boy in third year of High School, was the skipper at the time. He
knew exactly what to do. He gunned full power, driving our canoe straight up
the side of the huge wave. We knifed through the top just as it tumbled over.
We must have been ten metres up in the air. We crashed heavily into the trough
below. Tony raced the canoe into the next wave and bang, down again. This
continued until we got beyond the breakers, and we all collapsed from sheer
terror at what could have happened.

We took a few deep breaths, and headed back in again, more cautiously this
time. Searching carefully, we found the narrow entrance and headed in quite
safely between two sets of waves. I remember putting my foot on the beach
and feeling my knees really trembling. Much relieved, we climbed the steep
steps to the priest's house.

After Ataa, the rest of the journey around North Malaita was within the lagoon.
It was quite simple, compared to what we had been through. We travelled
around the top end of Malaita and then down the western side, stopping to visit
the students in the villages at Malu'u and Takwa, and finally reached Auki. We
dropped Norm Arkwright off at the airport and the two boys got off in Auki
town. I took the canoe down Langalanga Lagoon, back to the mission station
at Buma, some thirty kilometres further on. I remember cruising down the
lagoon, very happy that we had completed this great three-week epic around
the island. To complete the story, Tom Koeni became an agriculture teacher at
Tenaru. We often used to discuss this trip when I returned as principal and he
was on staff. Tony Wale also taught Manual Arts at Tenaru for a while and then
taught in the Western Solomons. The small outboard motor, which didn't fail
us on the trip, never worked again!

**New Chapel**

During 1978 a new chapel for the school was completed. Father Norm
Arkwright SM, the school's deputy headmaster, was the architect and
foreman of works, while Father Louis Morosini SM, who had been parish
priest at Rokera during the Brothers' time there, was in charge of
fundraising. Constructed mainly by students, under the supervision of
Father Arkwright, the chapel was a remarkable achievement, with its
unique traditional design. Sister Claire O'Brien SMSM designed the
artwork.
7 July 1978 marked the day of Independence for Solomon Islands, a significant day of unity for the small country of 200,000 people. The formal ceremony in Honiara represented a final fling for colonialism and the old British ways as Des Murphy reported in the *Marist Monthly* of September 1978:

It was all very splendid with a goodly dash of British pomp. Nearly everyone from Honiara and surrounding areas converged on the main sporting arena at Lawson Tama as the bewigged chief justice, a delicate looking Duke, looking not quite right in all that military finery, a portly young Governor General and non-charismatic Prime Minister went through some strange motions. All very European and missing out on a great chance of lifting proceedings with some rich traditional ceremonies which would mean something to the thousands of puzzled onlookers. With barking of orders, snapping of rifles and presenting arms, two NCOs advanced on the flagpole. With a great rush, most undignified really for Dame Britannia, the Union Jack flounced down and then, purposefully, the new flag, beautiful in its blue green and gold, rose to the masthead.

Apart from a group of secessionists in Western Province, who for a short time wanted to be part of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islanders welcomed the dawning of a new period in their history. At Tenaru, the school marked the occasion some days later with a visit from the Prime Minister. The visit almost ended in disaster, as Paul Murphy explains:
Independence occurred during the holidays. During the first week of the new term, we invited the Prime Minister to the school. Brother Bob Sutton built the stage with a fine canopy. This was where the new Prime Minister and all the dignitaries were to be seated. The students had decorated the structure tastefully with flowers and traditional symbols of welcome. The function went well and the Prime Minister spoke to the assembled students about the new nation of Solomon Islands. Brother Jeff was there on the stage with many invited politicians and other important people. The function came to an end and the Prime Minister and his party prepared to leave. As soon as he stepped into his car and drove off, the entire stage construction and canopy collapsed and fell on top of where the Prime Minister had been seated. If he'd stayed there another minute, he would have been killed. Naturally we accosted Bob and suggested to him that this was a very dangerous structure that he'd erected, but his reply was, “Well, I built it to last only for the event.” Bob’s timing was absolutely perfect.

Visit of Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II visited Solomon Islands in May 1984. Brother Julian Quinlan recalls the event:

When the Pope came, there was a huge outdoor Mass where we assisted with the singing and traditional dancing for the Entrance and Offertory processions. John Maneniariu from Are'are (Malaita) organised the students to make the panpipes and rehearse the dancing. I organised the singing, for which we selected songs that would be known by the majority of the people. Early in the day of his visit, the Pope met with religious at Holy Cross Cathedral. Brother Kevin Murray was one of those chosen to receive Holy Communion from the Pope.

Cultural Values

An important feature of school life at Tenaru was the establishment of “camps” along the river. These were loosely organised in language groups and here students relaxed, were able to speak their own language, and cared for younger or newly arrived students in an environment closer to their own village lifestyle. On weekends, the school provided the students with food for camp cooking. Hunting, fishing, and telling stories were favourite camp activities which provided a healthy break from school routine.

Similar to other schools, Tenaru used the talents of the various language-culture groups to enrich the school's liturgical life. A long-standing
The practice of “custom nights” (similar to “cultural days” at other schools) originated at St Paul's Aruligo and continued at Tenaru. Such events provided opportunity not only for leadership and creativity among the students, but also for enhancing their appreciation of their own cultural dance and music. Often older people from home villages gave advice to help the students get things culturally right. The Tenaru custom nights were a spectacular display of song, music and drama from all over Solomon Islands.

All Tenaru headmasters of this period, Jeff Crowe, Julian Quinlan and Paul Murphy, encouraged such cultural activities. In 1987 an invitation came for a small group of Tenaru Pan Pipers to attend the Pacific Arts Festival in Tahiti. Following the group's popular acclaim at that event, the school decided to have some recordings made of the students'
traditional music, especially the pan pipers. Then followed an invitation
to perform at Expo '88 in Brisbane, Australia, where numerous audiences
appreciated the quality of the students' performances and their pride in
their culture.

Laumanasa House

Another development, not directly related to the school, occurred on
the Tenaru site in 1988. The Brothers saw the benefit of owning a
piece of land, which the local Brothers could identify as a “Melanesian
home place”, yet the Tenaru site had always been Diocesan (mission)
land. Furthermore, the District had set up a house of studies in Goroka,
Papua New Guinea, in 1979, and, because of the increasing number of
young Solomon Brothers recently professed, it was time to do the same
in Solomon Islands. At first it was thought these two needs could be
met by transferring the title of the block of land where the Tenaru
Brothers House stood. The Diocese, however, was reluctant to hand
over the land and house to the Brothers, because the long-term presence
of the Brothers on the school staff could not be guaranteed. After
investigating various properties in Honiara town, the Brothers decided
to ask the Diocese for a block of land at Tenaru, a short distance from
the school buildings.

There were many matters for discussion and decision: the location of
the block and its boundary, transfer of deeds from the Diocese, ownership
of the cocoa trees on the preferred site, plans for the buildings,
arrangements for a loan and choice of a building contractor. Brother
Ray Arthur, recently arrived from Wabag in the Highlands of Papua
New Guinea, was the on-site negotiator and supervisor. Land titles
were transferred from the Diocese to the Marist Brothers, giving the
Brothers ownership of the block on which buildings were to be built. A
small compensation was paid to the school for the cocoa plantation
which was on part of the block. Following acceptance of an innovative
design for the main house and smaller residential cabins, two different
contractors began work on the buildings in August 1987. Ray Arthur
recalls the busy construction period:
In 1987 I was a full time teacher at St Joseph’s, head of the Mathematics department, and supervising the construction of the new buildings, with my limited knowledge of building matters. Luckily, Brother Clem SM, who had building experience, was available to assist occasionally. After school each day, I used to go up to the building site, check what was happening, walk through the buildings and talk to the builders. I moved into the buildings about March of 1988 with a few of the young Brothers.

Although work was to continue for some time in putting finishing touches to some buildings, the new community officially began on 17 May when Brother Alan Elliott prepared the first meal in the new house. The first community comprised Brothers Ray Arthur, Alan Elliott, Dominic Alebua, Martin Tsuki, Joseph Akwasitaloa and Jack Kalisto.

The opening of Laumanasa House occurred on 3 June 1989, beginning at the nearby grave of Brother Alphonsus Laumanasa, where former Brother Benedict Kinika spoke about his colleague, Alphonsus, after whom the building was named. (See photo on page 79).
Nephew of Brother Alphonsus Laumanasa, who shares his name, plants a memorial tree on the occasion of the opening of Laumanasa House

At that time, the house was essentially a post-novitiate formation centre, where young Brothers received further training as Marist Brothers while attending the nearby teachers' college. Later, with an increasing number of young aspirants, there was a need for a postulancy, and the focus of Laumanasa House changed to pre-novitiate formation.

Ray Arthur remained at Laumanasa House until 1992. His role in the school was reduced as he assumed responsibility for vocation work in the Solomons, as well as looking after the postulants. Except for the years of the Solomon Islands ethnic tensions (1999 to 2002), Laumanasa House continued as a formation centre until the present time (2003), under the leadership of Brothers Ray Arthur, Paul Murphy, Henry Uguni and Severino Lausao.
Changes in the Staff at St Joseph's

It was during these years that Brothers Celestine Kulagoe and Lucien Kii, the first of the second wave of Solomon Islands Brothers, completed their studies at University of South Pacific in Fiji, returned to the District and began teaching at Tenaru. Both these Brothers left the Congregation after a few years of teaching. During this period too, the first sisters of the local congregation, Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI), and a little later Dominican Sisters, joined the school staff, further adding to its the richness and diversity.

At the end of 1990, when Paul Murphy's time as headmaster of St Joseph's Tenaru came to an end, the Brothers, in conjunction with Diocesan authorities, decided that the time had come for transition to lay leadership of the school. Paul's deputy headmaster, Solomon Islander Joseph Neilsen, agreed to accept the position, and thus began another chapter in the long and colourful history of St Joseph's Secondary School Tenaru.
Chapter 22

Koromira, Buin and Marai
1976-1989

Koromira

1976 saw two new openings on Bougainville: Koromira and Buin. Both stations were established relatively early by the Marist Fathers, Buin in 1903 and Koromira in 1908 by Father Rausch. Rigu ex-student, Joseph Valei, who was the headmaster at Koromira, knew the Brothers at Rigu, only thirty kilometres to the north of his school, and wanted to have on staff Marist Brothers, whose spirit and educational style he admired. The parish priest, Father Bob Foley SM, and Bishop Lemay were open to the idea and the number of local Brothers was increasing as young men returned from their formation in Fiji. This allowed the Provincial, Br Charles Howard, to make two Brothers available for the school at Koromira. They were two of the Bougainville pioneers, Bernard Kangku and Michael Kaminei, who were at that time both in their forties. The school, which had an enrolment of about sixty students, was a happy place, and Joseph Valei was delighted with his two Brothers, who, by their easy agreeable manner and professional approach to their teaching, made quite an impact on the school. Bernard and Michael got on well together and thoroughly enjoyed the work. Some of the students were boarders and the Brothers were fully occupied in caring for the students, and helping to organise the different aspects of school life: school gardens, liturgical celebrations, sport and studies. Bernard Kangku was noted for regular visits to parents to keep them informed of their children's progress. The small Marist community progressed well, making occasional visits to Rigu by motorbike.

In 1977 Brother Felix Koneana, a newly professed Buin man keen to begin his teaching career, joined them. The following year, after some time in hospital in Vunapope (near Rabaul), he was able to return and complete the year at Rigu. The community in 1979 comprised Bernard Kangku and Brother John Narebo, who had finished his studies in Suva
the previous year. At short notice, John left the Brothers, so Bernard was alone in the community. Brother Bertrand Webster, coordinator of the Brothers in Bougainville and Solomon Islands from 1978, decided that, under these circumstances, it would be best to close the Koromira community, as he had no one available to join Bernard. Bernard would have preferred to stay on, as he explains:

In 1979, Brother John Narebo from Nagovis came to join me, but he did not stay. He left and went back to his village at Nagovis. Bertie [Bertrand Webster], who was the Superior, told me to go to join the community at Rigu. I wanted to stay by myself at Koromira. I told Bertie, “Don't worry about me. I'll be alright by myself.” But Bertie told me to come back to Rigu. I was disappointed because the people were good and I liked the place. Brother John Mauro's people are there too. They were supportive. John Mauro is starting something there next year [2001].

In 2001, after an absence of more than twenty years, the Marist Brothers returned to Koromira when Brother John Paul Mauro joined the staff of St Gregory's Vocational School. While being attached to the Mabiri community, he lived at Koromira as a member of the staff of St Gregory's for several years.

**Buin High School**

Brother Ray Arthur, the foundation member of the Buin community, arrived in Papua New Guinea on 19 January 1976, his twenty-seventh birthday. It was just after midnight when he stepped off the plane in Port Moresby, where, even at that late hour, the radiant heat from the tarmac and the still, stifling humid night air were vivid first impressions. Things improved a week later when, after repeated delays, he finally arrived in Rigu:

I remember seeing all the coconut trees and thinking, “This is paradise.” Rigu was a simple place, but I really loved it. There was a great spirit among the Brothers there at that time. I really felt, this is what Marist Brothers life is all about. Every day I used to swim in the ocean. I really enjoyed the kids. I had a dormitory at that stage. I really enjoyed the whole situation. I had been there for only nine months when I was appointed to Buin.

It was only a few months after Papua New Guinea achieved its Independence that trouble began in Buin, South Bougainville. A strong
secession movement in that area led to the burning of the District office in Buin town, partial destruction of the jail, theft of a large supply of explosives and tearing up of parts of the airstrip.

The Government High School at Buin was not going well at that time. In the 1970s there was a high proportion of expatriate staff, some of whom considered Buin to be an isolated and remote outpost. This resulted in low morale, high staff turnover and misunderstandings between some staff and local people. A few instances of unprofessional staff behaviour further aggravated an already tense situation. Thus, when some secessionist-related rascal bands vandalised the school, there was no strong community reaction to assist school authorities in dealing with the problems. Consequently, the Government authorities threatened to close the school, further straining relationships between the Buin people and the Central Government. No doubt influenced by the political tensions, the Education Department decided to close the school about June 1976. The police riot-squad arrived to quell potential violence, teachers were evacuated, and most students were forced to return to their villages. Some students transferred to other schools in the Province, including sixteen boys who joined the Grade Ten class at Rigu.

For two months Buin High School remained closed while police guards secured the buildings. When negotiations began to re-open the school, some Buin people wanted exclusively Bougainvillean teachers, while others, concerned about the moral and religious education of their children, made an informal approach to the Brothers at Rigu to provide Marist Brothers to join the staff. Brother Bertrand Webster, the newly appointed coordinator of the Brothers in the region, was sympathetic to the request, and gained the necessary approval from the Sydney Provincial, Charles Howard, to ask Ray Arthur to join the staff. Ray recalls his appointment to Buin:

     At that time, it was the second term holiday at Rigu and I decided to go and visit as many families of the students as I could. So I took off from Rigu, heading for Buka. When I got to Hanahan village on Buka, I was with Brother Julian Hakumin at the time, I slept there, and I heard on the radio, they were talking about reopening Buin, and that ‘Brother Ray Arthur was going to go to Buin High School.' That was the first I had heard of it! Actually, before I left
on the trip, we had talked about the need to send Brothers to Buin to help them to restart. John Momis, chairman of the board of Buin High School, requested the Brothers to join the staff. So Bertrand, in consultation with the Provincial, Charles Howard, said that I could be sent down there. Mr Martin Baubake, one of the school Board Members, was also influential in asking for Brothers and in taking an interest in us when we got there. Sadly, Martin was later killed during the Bougainville crisis. On 21 September 1976 I left Kieta airport on the 7.30 flight to Buin. Father John Keady SM met me and drove me straight to the school, where the student assembly was in progress. About one hundred students were present, one quarter of the full enrolment. After a short teachers' meeting, we were asked to prepare programmes for the remaining three months of the year. The students had missed a lot of work. Only two teachers from the previous staff remained and Mr Damian Rapase from Buka was the new headmaster.

Initially, Ray stayed with Father Keady at Turiboiru Mission, moving into a school house some days later. Brother Julian Quinlan of the Ashgrove community in Australia was to be Ray's companion in 1977, but, in the intervening months, Brother Alan Elliott agreed to come to Buin, arriving on 30 September. He was a 59-year-old Australian Brother who had managed the Brothers' farm at Mittagong, Australia, for the previous twenty-six years. His only formal teaching experience was as a young Brother in the 1940s when he had taught in several schools in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Nevertheless, during his brief stay at Buin in 1976, he accepted a full teaching load, assisted with religious instruction and led the singing practices. His warm acceptance by the students prompted his decision to return to Buin on a full-time basis in September 1977. When Alan returned to Australia, Brother Julian Hakumin, a Bougainvillean Brother from the Rigu community, stayed with Ray until the arrival of Brother Julian Quinlan in late November. Julian later spent two years in the community with Ray and Alan, while teaching at the school. Julian, as mentioned in earlier chapters, was a thorough and most professional educator. His enthusiasm and organisational skills contributed much to the re-establishment of the school. Brother Mark Humphries also spent one year at Buin in 1978.

Bertrand Webster wished the Brothers to have a supportive role in the school at Buin, rather than accept administrative positions. Nonetheless, the Brothers made an enormous contribution, as Ray Arthur recalls:
I had six years in Buin, a thoroughly enjoyable time in my life. I had a fair bit of responsibility, being a level three teacher. It was a big school, 500 students, mostly boarders, both boys and girls. It was a bigger school than Rigu. I worked closely with the headmaster, organised staff in-services, worked with the student leaders and took a special responsibility for the Catholic students. I was also in charge of Mathematics and Science, and took an interest in pastoral care of the boys. When I look back over the years, I think Buin was one of the most fulfilling times in my life.

Education at Buin High School in the 1980s, as at most PNG schools, was fairly traditional, the curriculum consisting of basic courses in English, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Agriculture and practical subjects. The Education Department, from the time of Independence, worked hard to modify the Australian syllabuses used in the colonial era, to make them more applicable to Papua New Guineans, but such enlightened innovations were in their infancy and change came slowly. Nonetheless, the Brothers were able to add their creative flair to support less experienced teachers, providing encouragement and a wealth of helpful suggestions. Mark Humphries developed useful units in
Agriculture, relevant to Bougainvillean needs, Ray Arthur spent many days working with teachers and organised several science excursions to the Panguna copper mine, Alan Elliott worked mainly with remedial classes and Religious Instruction. One unique innovation was the introduction of two religious instruction classes per week, one in denominational groups, the other in a combined class. This ecumenical approach and generous time allocation to religious allocation were previously unheard of in Government schools.

**Alan's Contribution**

While in Australia, Alan Elliott undertook courses in First Aid and remedial education to enable him to assist in those areas on his return. His first task at Buin, a Government school with a high proportion of Catholic students, was to construct a chapel underneath the Brothers' house, which would serve as a prayer and Mass centre for the school. The Brothers (and the new chapel) became a focal point for promoting the liturgical life of the Catholic community within the school. The United Church Scripture Union group also made good use of the chapel.

Alan remained at Buin as Community Leader for six years until the end of 1983. His most memorable contribution was his work in the clinic, where he attended thousands of cases each year – more than 8,000 in 1978 alone. At any time of the day or night, each patient received compassionate, respectful, professional care, whether the problem was a scratch requiring a simple dressing or a life-threatening case of malaria. This work was demanding, but Alan enjoyed it, and pushed himself beyond the limit to care for the sick people in the school and beyond. His own health was not robust; he contracted malaria, suffered from tropical ulcers and became generally run down at times, as a result of the long hours spent in the clinic. This sensitive man experienced intense personal loss when students in his care died as a result of malaria. There were three such cases over the six years Alan ran the clinic. Each was transported to hospital prior to the student's condition becoming critical; nonetheless, such tragedies affected him deeply. His companion at Buin for the final two years was Brother Majella Fitzpatrick, who recalls Alan's work:
Alan did marvellous work with the sick students. He was one of the truly great Brothers. At all hours of the night, he would take people to the hospital whenever needed. If there was no space in the clinic, he would put the sick students with temperatures on the floor in our house, to monitor their progress. He was very thoughtful. People said they preferred him to the nurses in the hospital because he was so dedicated. Alan also gave religious instruction in the school.

![Alan fishing during a visit to Rigu, 1979](image)
On the beach in front of Brothers’ House

As he was leaving Buin at the end of 1983, Alan wrote:

On 13 December a farewell concert was held for those teachers leaving Buin. I received several presents of Siwai basketwork, including a large tray with my name worked into it. The students also collected a sum of money for me. This memorable evening brings to a close one of the happiest periods of my experience. In this atmosphere of love and gratitude I have really experienced the presence of God and learned to trust him more and more. May God bless all those who have helped me over the years, especially the Brothers who have shared time, tucker and prayers, not to mention Canasta.
Alan spent the following five years at Tenaru in the Solomon Islands where he assisted with formation. He returned to Australia in 1988 due to ill health and died in Brisbane in 1997.

Moving Around the Island

In the 1970s Buin was an isolated outpost at the southern end of Bougainville. Transport was difficult, the only road access to Kieta being through Siwai, Nagovis, across the Crown Prince Range, through the Panguna mine site and down to Arawa. The roads through Siwai and Nagovis were in poor condition, often impassable after rain. There were few bridges and river crossings were hazardous or impossible after rain. In the 1980s a more direct road to Arawa was completed, following a route through Koromira on the east coast.

Alan Elliott tells the story of a stolen vehicle and a lucky escape from the flooded Muliko River, which is a few kilometres north of Buin on the Koromira road:

In August 1982 rascals from Koromira forced the side rear window of our Suzuki then pushed it away from our house before crossing wires to start it. They drove to Buka and then back to Koromira where they rolled the car. Their
former leader later drove the car back to Buin and returned it to us in a damaged state. He asked me to drive him back to Koromira in the pouring rain. The road was impossible. As we were crossing the Muliko, we were swept downriver but were saved by a big rock. Fortunately bridge construction workers saw our plight, attached ropes to the Suzuki and pulled us out. It took us four hours to drive to Rigu, where I left the car in the Arawa repair shop and flew back to Buin two days later.

Ray Arthur spent most of his holidays in his early years on Bougainville travelling around the island, staying in villages and mission stations, as he explains:

I did a lot of travelling, visiting the students' families and walking around villages with students. At one stage, I actually walked around the whole island of Bougainville. At that time students came from the whole island, so I was able to go to almost every part of Bougainville. I spent four weeks of my holidays travelling and staying with families or mission stations. That was a good experience in itself, because it gave me a very good understanding of the people, the situation, and the families. I had a backpack and I often stayed at mission stations with priests or with families in the villages. For me, it was a sense of abandoning myself to God - just pack your bag and go. I didn't carry much with me; I'd just see what happened. The generosity of people and the welcome at so many places made me really feel at home. Sometimes I would catch a ride on a passing vehicle. Hitch hiking or walking, I just travelled on, not worrying about where I was going to stay next. At times I was able to send a message on to the next mission station that I was coming. I do feel bad about Father Grenier's unfinished haircut. While I was staying with him at his station at Kuraio on the East Coast, he asked me to cut his hair. He had a pair of hand clippers and my hand was paining like hell, using the hand clippers to cut his hair. Kuraio is a remote station and there is hardly any passing traffic, perhaps one or two cars a day. I had been with Father Grenier a day or two and I was ready to move on. While I was cutting Father's hair, I heard a vehicle coming. I dropped the clippers, grabbed my bag, and ran to the car to get a lift. I spoke to Father Grenier about it later, about twenty years later. He still remembered it, the story of the haircut.

Closure of the Buin Community

Ray Arthur's replacement at Buin was a vigorous fifty-five year old Australian Brother, Majella Fitzpatrick, freshly arrived in the country, having completed many years' service in Australian schools, including being headmaster of four schools in Victoria. Majella served four years at Buin, first with Alan, then with Brother Kevin Agnew and finally
with Brother Canute Sheehan. When Majella left at the end of 1986, Brother Michael Jones joined Canute for two years. In 1989, Brothers Ken McDonald and Malcolm Hall formed the community. Due to needs elsewhere, the Buin community was closed at the end of that year.

The Buin students maintained their Marist connections after the Brothers left. Majella Fitzpatrick tells the story of arranging a gathering of Marist ex-students, years later, at Kaindi Teachers' College in Wewak. He invited ex-students from St Xavier's Kairiru and St Joseph's Rigu to the meeting. He was surprised and delighted when a delegation of ex-students from Buin High School approached him. “We heard you are holding a meeting for ex-Marist Students. Is it okay if the Buin High School ex-students come along too? We are Marist ex-students as well!”

**Marai**

In the 1980s the Brothers wanted to establish a community of young Brothers who would work in a community school. Brother Jeffrey Crowe, the District Superior of the time, explains the need and describes the establishment of the community at Marai:

We needed a place for our Brothers who were community school teachers. When they were in community at secondary schools, the programme of these big schools tended to dominate everything, especially since the primary schools were generally some distance away. The primary Brothers wanted a place of their own. Also, it was time for a community of PNG Brothers, time for a new experience in living Marist life in a rural setting.

We consulted the Catholic Education Office about places that might suit. It was not easy to find somewhere close enough to Kieta for good communication and with vacancies for teachers. While not ideal, Marai met our basic needs and so we decided to found a new community there.

Even though Marai was reasonably close to Kieta, it was different world. The air was fresher, the flowers brighter, the birds more plentiful – and no heavy traffic! There was also an active millennium movement not far away, just to make things interesting. The Brothers lived in very simple conditions – one of the bedrooms had no windows at one stage. They were enterprising though and fixed up a water supply so that they did not have to make the journey down to the creek and back at all hours. The families were generous in supplying taro, fruit and vegetables – the students dropped these off on their way to school.
in the morning. Since there was no resident priest, the Brothers were often called on to help the catechist in organising Sunday liturgies and other religious celebrations.

The hardest part of life there was not the living conditions, however. It was the smallness of the community and the demands this made on good relationships between the Brothers. For a number of years there were only two in the community. When someone was away or sick, it could also be a lonely place. For the Brothers who were used to bigger communities with a lot of companionship, it was a tough life.

Marai, located in the foothills, several kilometres west of Aropa, was the third Melanesian Community in the District of PNG and Solomon Islands, following Rokera in 1971 and Koromira in 1976. The Marist community worked at Marai from 1982 to 1988. This was a significant venture, as it was the first community composed entirely of the “younger generation” of Melanesian Brothers. While conveniently close to Rigu, the new community was an outreach to a region with great needs. Brother Robert Nomonu, one of the Marai pioneers, describes their work at the school:

When Marai community opened in 1982, the first Brothers were Melchior Jalowa (superior and headmaster), Robbie Nomonu (Bursar) and John Lunga. The
school, which had an enrolment of 200 students, was a happy and peaceful place and the people were delighted with the presence of the Brothers among them. We were fully occupied, helping to organise the different aspects of school life, school gardens, sport and liturgical celebrations. Because there was no resident priest, we played a key role in organizing the Sunday liturgies. Melchior and I joined the local soccer team, where I believe we had a big influence on the young people. Melchior was a hard worker in the school gardens and looking after the school grounds. He always had some boys working with him. I would say the Brothers had a big impact on the school. We all got on well together looking after each other and serving the school community.

The young Brothers who served at Marai were John Lunga, Melchior Jalowa, Robert Nomonu, Emil Tong and Felix Koneana. In 1986 and 1987, it became difficult to maintain the community at Marai, and, for a time, Melchior continued on staff at Marai while commuting each day from Rigu. The growing needs in other parts of the District finally prompted the closure of the Marai community and the withdrawal of the Brothers from the school at the end of 1987.
Chapter 23

Reaching Out
East Sepik, Papua New Guinea
1973 – 2003

For Marists in PNGSI the term “outreach” has come to mean serving in an area or situation outside the mainstream, usually in a region where there are few services and where the needs for educational ministry are urgent. It can reasonably be argued that any place in these developing countries meets the “outreach” criteria; nonetheless, Marist educators, impelled by their founding charism of availability to serve where others cannot, were and are willing to leave the amenities of the towns and remain open to foregoing personal comfort and security for the purpose of “educating those most in need”. (Marist Brothers’ Constitutions #2) To travel to a remote and difficult location with a one-way ticket, to live and work among “grassroots” people and to stay with them when the going gets tough require a special kind of courage and commitment. This book contains many examples of Marists responding to that challenge. The East Sepik story is a further illustration of how the Brothers and their co-workers searched to find ways of serving the people where they were and where needs were greatest.

Brother Canute Sheehan – Catholic Education Secretary – Wewak Diocese

In the early 1970s the education system in the Territory of Papua New Guinea was re-structured as a result of the Weedon Report, which recommended that the Government take responsibility for education across the country. Until that time the various Churches, particularly the Catholic Missions, were the major education providers. Under the new plan all teachers would be Government employees, while the Churches would maintain a degree of autonomy in running their schools. Teachers, whether in Government or Church schools, would be by paid by the Government, depending on their level of qualification.
Brother Canute responded to a request to accept the position of Catholic Education Secretary (C.E.S.) for the Wewak Diocese just at the time the Weedon Report was being implemented. Beginning his new role at the start of 1973, Canute's first concern was to upgrade the qualifications of his teachers, to enable them to receive a fair wage. In November 1973 he organised an upgrading course for those teachers and invited ten experienced Marist Brothers from Australia (Melbourne Province) and several local teachers to assist. The Melbourne Brothers included Frank Hopkins, Mark Needham, Neil Emmett, Evin Roughana and Austin Stephens. There were about one hundred teachers undertaking the course, which was held at Kaindi Teachers' College in Wewak, a joint venture by the Christian Brothers and the Mercy Sisters, which had opened in 1968. The upgrading course was successful for these mission teachers, and enjoyable and satisfying for the visiting Australians, who took the opportunity to visit Kairiru and several other places around the Sepik.

Canute spent a total of eleven years as Catholic Education Secretary, his main task being to support and encourage teachers in the Diocese's schools, mostly scattered throughout the remote parts of the Sepik. Canute reflects on his role:

I was able to do a fair amount of influential stuff once I got the swing of things. It was a massive change from having my own little kids in my own class and having a tremendous amount of fun at the school level, to suddenly finding myself with 250 teachers in forty-five schools which had to be attended to, administration-wise, academic-wise, and every otherwise. With the help of some very good people we built it up. I remember I started in December 1972 with 250 teachers; at least 150 of them were my own ex-students. When I staggered out at the end of 1983, we had eighty-four schools and well over 300 teachers. For the first year I was the only Marist Brother living there in Wirui Mission. That was hard, but in 1974 Brother Kevin Mackin arrived on the scene.

Canute first lived in a spare room in the priests' house, but, on Kevin's arrival, the Brothers were assigned a house of their own in the mission complex, a former hostel. That year, Brother Terry Kane joined the new Wewak community, his role being to cater for the needs of St Xavier's on Kairiru, essentially driving around the Sepik villages to
purchase garden food and arrange for its transport to the island. Terry's truck accident in June 1974 (see Chapter 16) brought a sudden end to his first Wewak appointment and he returned to Australia for some time for treatment and convalescence before returning to Kairiru. Kevin, the superior of the community and Canute's assistant in his role as Catholic Education Secretary, describes their work in the Wewak Annals entry of 28 January 1974:

Canute and Kevin swing into top gear – handling the opening of schools, placing teachers, distributing school supplies, interviewing parents, advising school leavers, attending meetings at the District Education Office, consulting inspectors, arranging transport for boarding students, and visiting schools by foot, canoe, truck, boat and plane.

Canute worked hard for his teachers, providing resources, organizing in-services or simply offering a word of encouragement where needed. In his role as Secretary, he filled a great need and made a valuable contribution to Catholic Education in the Province; the teachers found him encouraging, supportive and easy to relate to. In the later years of his period as C.E.S. he organised “teacher tours” to Australia. This was a scheme where teachers contributed from their salaries in order to save for a trip to Australia as a cultural exchange. Canute led a total of four groups, mostly Kaindi Teachers' College ex-students, in 1978, 1980, 1982 and 1983. Over the Christmas vacation, using a borrowed bus, and staying at schools or accommodation arranged by Brothers in Australia, Canute and his teachers drove through Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. These groups of male and female teachers, averaging ten or so in each group, had a wonderful experience of Australian culture and were able to share much of their own culture with their Australian hosts.

Later Sister Anne Frances Carroll (Mercy Sister) joined the team. Brother Herman Boyek reflects on the contribution of Canute and his team:

Canute Sheehan, Kevin Mackin and Sister Anne Carroll formed the Religious Education Team. They travelled around the Sepik schools in Canute's fifteen-seater bus, loaded up with resources, overhead projector and video camera. They gave in-services and retreats and helped the teachers in many ways. I
think that was the most powerful team ever. Anne Carroll herself was trained in Ireland in catechetics and Kevin and Canute had studied at EAPI in Manila. So they were “hot” on catechetics at that time. The older teachers around the Sepik still talk about them and still treasure the support they received in those days.

Canute Sheehan with a group of Kairiru Ex-students in Port Moresby

**Kunjingini**

In 1976 another “Sepik Outreach” began for the Marist Brothers. In that year Brothers Terry Kane and Kevin Mackin moved to Kunjingini, about 120 kilometres by road southwest of Wewak, reached after four hours or more of rough driving. Meanwhile, the Wewak community, Brothers Canute and Herman Boyek, shifted house to a new location at Mission Point, on the beach not far from the main Wirui Mission.
From 1976 to 1982 Marist Brothers worked at Kunjingini, a well-established mission station with a large community school of some 400 students. Kevin Mackin, who continued as Assistant Director of Religious Education, was the superior of the community of two. Terry Kane, his companion, involved himself with *Skul Anka*, a new Government initiative aimed at providing skills for village life for those not selected for high school education. Sister Mary Scanlon RSM worked with Terry in the Kunjingini Skul Anka. Melbourne Provincial, Brother Walter Smith, writing with great insight in the Melbourne Province Newsletter of February 1976, explained the rationale for placing Kevin at distant Kunjingini and for the establishment of a community in this relatively remote location:

Canute and Kevin supervise the sixty Catholic Schools of the East Sepik region, scattered along the coast, among the islands, in the swamplands, along the mighty Sepik and in the mountains. There are few roads. Kevin's location at Kunjingini, which is closer to the geographical centre of the District and in a high population area, will reduce the amount of travel. Setting up a community in Kunjingini allows our Brothers to get closer to the real life of New Guinea – the villages, which are the heart and soul of the country. Terry's involvement at Skul Anka is part of our commitment to the enrichment of village life. Later, our two local Brothers will have ample opportunity for ministry at one of a number of primary schools around Kunjingini. Maprik High School is nearby and we are considering providing a Brother for the staff there as well.

The Kunjingini Brothers lived with the parish priest until their house was completed. For some years, the Brothers, Mercy Sisters and parish priest formed an extended religious community, with shared prayer times and meals, a significant support in an isolated mission.

Later Brothers Melchior Jalowa, Herman Boyek, Joachim Igil and Lambert Mann joined the community. Due to the departure of some of the young Brothers in 1982 and to needs elsewhere, the community closed at the end of that year.

**Maprik High School**

Brother Malcolm Hall arrived at Kunjingini in 1977 and began work at Maprik High School, a large provincial boarding school of about five
hundred students, located about half an hour by car north of Kunjingini. A Mercy Sister, Madeline O'Dea, was also on the staff at Maprik at that time. Malcolm Hall went to Australia for medical treatment in October of 1982. Brother Ian McCombie replaced him, both as superior of the community at Kunjingini and teacher at Maprik.

East Sepik Region – Marist Communities and Schools

Marist Brothers Community at Wewak

At the beginning of 1976 the Brothers moved into a mission house on Windjammer Beach at Mission Point. The house had been a catechist centre, then, later, a hostel for single women, the “Christian Living Centre”, led by Mercy Sister Maura O'Shaughnessy. Criminal activity in the area and a shortage of Sisters forced Sister Maura to close the women's centre and thus the building became available. In the Christmas vacation of 1977 Brother Colman Carroll visited with a work crew from Australia and constructed additional accommodation. Later, in 1985, a second storey was added to one of the buildings. The next major renovation occurred in 1999 when Brother Ian McCombie upgraded the buildings, which were at that time used as a postulancy.
The Wewak Community was initially conceived as being a support community for St Xavier's Kairiru as well as a base for Canute and Kevin during their travels around the Diocese. Later, the Wewak Brothers were involved in various ministries. Brother Herman Boyek joined the community in 1976 to complete his teacher training studies at Kaindi Teachers' College. The following year he and Brother Melchior Jalowa joined the Kunjingini community and taught at the community school there. Brother Kevin Hogan was the superior of Wewak from 1976 to 1978 when the community essentially served as a base for Kairiru and Kunjingini, as well as for Canute. During the 1980s various Brothers assisted with purchase of supplies for St Xavier's, including Faber Turnbull, Leo McVeigh and Henry Jackson from the U.K.

Brother Cletus Howley, a remarkable Marist, a brilliant man and an entertaining story-teller, taught at Kaindi Teachers' College from 1980 to 1985, Herman Boyek joining him on the Kaindi staff in 1982-83. Due to ill health, Cletus returned to Australia in 1985, where he died in 1989. Brother Bertrand Webster began a long period of teaching at Kaindi in 1986.

In 1979 Bougainvillean Brothers Augustine Baillou from Buin and Peter Sinoau from Vito village, having completed their novitiate in Fiji, joined the Wewak community and attended Kaindi Teachers' College. The following year Brother Robert Nomonu from Buin joined them at Kaindi. These young men found the experience of living in Wewak difficult. Augustine transferred to Vunukanau Teachers' College (Rabaul) during 1980 and left the Brothers at the end of that year. Peter taught at Kunjingini and Marai (Bougainville) before leaving the Brothers, while Robert taught at Marai and then studied for a time in Australia, before returning to teach at Rigu from where he left the Brothers at the end of 1987. Robert maintained close contact with the Brothers and worked with them at Tarlena in Bougainville for a number of years in the 1990s.

Another aspect of the work of the Brothers at Wewak was the involvement of Kevin Mackin at Tangugo Catechist Training Centre in Wewak. The work of catechists in the mission plan of the Church was (and remains) a vital element in the work of the Church in PNG. At
Tangugo, catechists lived at the Centre with their families while undertaking programmes which varied in duration from several weeks to two years. The courses covered scripture, liturgy, sacraments, catechetics and pastoral methods. Other services offered by the Centre included training for deacons, and school retreats. Kevin worked at Tangugo for some years in the late seventies and early eighties. Brother Terry Lawlor assisted Kevin there in 1979.

_M.V. Marcellin and Lambert Mann_

Another interesting though short-lived outreach project began in 1987 when Terry Kane decided to rehabilitate a disused mission motor vessel for the purpose of visiting the remote schools on the Sepik River which were difficult to reach otherwise. There were about thirty Catholic Agency schools on the river, and these schools, until then, received few visits and little support from the Catholic Diocesan Education Coordinators. Terry, with occasional help from Brother Paul Johnston, re-fitted the boat, painting it bright yellow. Renamed _M.V. Marcellin_, it was based at Timbunke on the river, due south of Wewak, about 200 kilometres from the Sepik mouth. Later in 1987 a grant of two thousand kina from _Missio_ in Germany helped to refit the boat.

Lambert Mann, a former Marist Brother, was assigned by Terry to take charge of the boat and to coordinate the support of the Sepik River schools. Lambert, from Kanengra village in the Biwat area, was one of three Diocesan Education Coordinators in Terry's team at that time. The boat enabled the team to serve the Sepik schools for about two years, until its age and the high cost of regular maintenance caused its second retirement.

_Bishop Leo High School Wewak_

Bishop Ray Kalisz approached the Brothers in 1981, asking for a Marist headmaster for a new Catholic Provincial High School to be opened at Wirui Mission. After the Kunjingini community closed in 1982, Malcolm Hall was appointed in 1983 as the founding headmaster of Bishop Leo High School, named after the “flying Bishop Arkfeld”. There
he worked for the following five years, gradually bringing the school from its modest enrolment of about eighty Year Sevens in 1983 to a full Year Ten school by 1986. Malcolm established a fine spirit in the school; his leadership was greatly respected, as Jeff Crowe reports in his 1986 newsletter article on the first Grade Ten graduation:

What a great day for Malcolm, 31 October, on the occasion of the Blessing and official opening of Bishop Leo High School and the first graduation of Grade 10s. Bishop Leo had flown himself up from Madang [where he was Archbishop at that time] and, with a host of priests led by Wewak's Bishop Ray Kalisz, presided over a truly joyful Eucharist. The singing was extraordinary, even by Wirui's high standards. Each of the parishes of Wewak town provided some colour to the occasion in traditional dancing. Malcolm calmly sat through it all, as his staff organised all the practicalities. It was a real community event, a tribute to the spirit Malcolm worked hard to develop. Tears were shed in abundance as the evening drew on and the pioneering Grade 10s sadly took their leave.

Malcolm returned to Australia at the end of 1987. He resumed his work in the District in the mid 1990s when he went to Bougainville at the height of the Crisis. He worked for a time in the Catholic Education Office in Buka and then on the staff of St Mary's High School, Asitavi. Returning to Australia as a result of ill health in 1996, he died in October 1998.

**Passam National High School**

The system of National High Schools began in the 1970s, when, under pressure from the University of PNG and Lae Unitech, the Department of Education introduced Grade Twelve, essentially as a pre-requisite for tertiary studies. Prior to that Grade Ten graduates could gain entry to university, where their first year was an introductory bridging course. The National High Schools accepted students from anywhere in the country and were the only schools which catered for students undertaking Grades Eleven and Twelve. Sogeri (near Port Moresby) and Keravat (Rabaul) had always been selective institutions and became the first National High Schools. Passam (East Sepik) and Aiyura (Eastern Highlands) opened in the 1970s. Marist Brothers served on the Passam staff for fourteen years, from 1978 to 1991. Brother Pat Howley, the
I went to Passam in 1978. At the time I had gone there with the expectation of being senior subject master, social science. But, at the last minute, the bloke that they were lining up as headmaster changed his mind. The inspector, my friend Neil Murray, asked me if I would be principal. So I took the job by default. I rang up Walter, the Provincial; Walter rang up Canute. Canute said, “Let him take it. Give him a go.” So I had a go. When I first went up there, Terry Kane came with me as station manager; his role was essentially maintenance of the school. Later, Brother Bernie Schultz was there with me. On the community level, it was tough. At first we were a small independent community. Later, we were attached to the Wewak community, although we always retained our staff house at Passam. Often I was there by myself. And it was bloody hard work. It was lonely, because I wasn't one of the staff, in that I was the headmaster, and I wasn't a secular like them. I got on very well with the staff. But there were difficulties at times.

The students were the top one percent, really intelligent students. In 1978 there were boys only; the girls came the following year. There was always a bit of tension in the air, because the students who saw themselves as future leaders were always jockeying for positions and tended to form groups along ethnic lines. This made things dangerous at times but it was an interesting scene. During the years that I was there, we had only one national teacher, an excellent social science teacher; all the rest were expatriates including many from England.

We had only three simple school rules: you must attend school, you must do your share of manual work and you must use your commonsense. I spent an enormous amount of time on the human relations side of things - I taught nothing else. That doesn't mean to say that everything went sweetly. We had some terrible tussles. Every now and again we would run into strife and the students would refuse to cooperate.

On one occasion, one group accused me of being prejudiced against them. They demanded that I meet them, so I met them. We appointed a neutral chairman and they brought all their complaints against me. I answered them. When we finished that afternoon, it was well after teatime. When all was finished, I said, “Right, now, you have asked me to meet you. Tomorrow I want you to come and meet me and I will tell you all the objections I have got about you!” So they came back the next day. I just went through all my concerns. I took half an hour, whereas they took an hour and a half the previous day. It was interesting because they thought that it was great that I was prepared to meet them on their own grounds and come back at them. It is an adversarial culture. I enjoyed Passam, but I was glad to finish. After five years I was completely worn out.
Other Brothers who later worked on the staff at Passam were Brothers Noel Hickey, Julian Quinlan, Ralph Arnell and Kevin Hoare.

**Postulancy Training at Wewak**

In 1991 Guy Yuangi from Munji village in East Sepik Province was the first Marist postulant to be welcomed into the Wewak community. While at Wewak, Guy, who was a qualified teacher, taught at Perigo Community School, close to the Wewak Airport. Later that year he transferred to the District Headquarters at Sixteen Mile, Central Province, where he joined two other postulants.

In 1992 Brother Majella Fitzpatrick joined the Wewak community as postulant master for the following four years. Majella's commitment to his work of promoting vocations was outstanding. He spent many weeks travelling around villages and mission stations, from remote parts of the Highlands, through the Sepik, Madang and Lae. This work involved a lot of uncomfortable travel and long walks to remote villages, not easy for a sixty-five year old with arthritic knees! Majella followed up his visits with regular correspondence to prospective candidates. Somehow Majella found time to carry out some major maintenance projects on the Wewak house which were paid for from the thousands of kina that he raised by correction of CODE papers (College of Distance Education). Following a renewal year in 1996, Majella returned to his home Province of Melbourne for knee replacement surgery. Mobile once more, Majella returned to the District in 1998, where he resumed his vocation work at Tsiroge in Bougainville, and opened the Bougainville postulancy there in 1999, a venture which operated for three years. Majella returned to Australia at the end of 2001, ending a total of seventeen years of extraordinarily dedicated service to the people of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Herman Boyek replaced Majella as postulant master at Wewak in 1996. Brother John Paul Mauro was Herman's assistant. Brother Ralph Arnell returned to the District in 2000 to assume the role of postulant master at Wewak.
Bongos

At a meeting of the Melanesian Brothers in December 1994 the issue of an “outreach” opening was prominent in the discussions. The District Superior of the time, Brother Ray Arthur, pursued the idea, believing it was time for the District to open a community which served a remote part of the country. Terry Kane, in his travels around the Sepik, saw the need to support schools in remote areas of the Sepik. It was he who first proposed that a Marist community could be of great assistance to the community school at Bongos, which at the time served several surrounding villages and had an enrolment of around 400 students. In 1996 Brothers Joachim Igil, Guy Yuangi and Terry Kane were the first community appointed to Bongos. Ray Arthur, in the District Newsletter of March 1996, records the beginning of the new community and some of the early challenges:

The three Brothers set out for Bongos from Wewak on 20 January. It was tough going. Their vehicle became bogged near Tau mission, and they were forced to continue the journey over mountains and through rivers on foot the following day, laden with cargo - a walk of some six and a half hours. Bongos mission and school are at the top of a mountain; the view is truly breathtaking. The people are delighted the Brothers have come and were genuinely surprised when school opened on time, having waited weeks in the past for teachers to arrive. On the first day more than one hundred students arrived to enrol in Grade One; unfortunately there was space for only fifty in the small classroom.

Guy Yuangi, who remained on the staff throughout the four years of the Brothers' presence in Bongos, reflects on his experiences there:

It was an interesting adventure for me. We felt a spirit of working as a team. When we arrived, it was like bringing life to the students. Even if it was raining, or the students were sick, they would still come to school because they were really eager to learn. They always tried their best, even though they really struggled with English. The people were respectful and supportive; they provided all the garden food for us. It was an isolated spot, and we did not have the luxuries of town life. Terry's role was to visit the schools in the surrounding area, as well as being a strong support to our community. Terry stayed with us for just over a year, but then his health started to deteriorate and he went down to Wewak. He never gave up doing his job, even though he was getting sick. While in Wewak, Terry used to do the shopping for us and send it up on the plane. We were well supplied with books and resources, thanks to Terry's good organisation.
The Marist Superior General, Brother Benito Arbues, and Councillor General, Brother Jeff Crowe, visited the District at the beginning of 1997 and made the difficult trip to Bongos by small plane to Arkosame airstrip, followed by a three-hour walk up steep mountain tracks and across a big river. Both were impressed with the simple lifestyle at Bongos and the support the Brothers were providing for the teachers there. Benito compared Bongos to the remote schools in rural France founded by the Founder of the Brothers, Marcellin Champagnat; the purpose of both was to provide Christian education to country children who were denied the educational opportunities available in more developed areas.

In 1998 the school was upgraded to a “top-up” school with the addition of Grades Seven and Eight. The school's remoteness caused some staffing problems about that time; teachers were unwilling to work in such a remote location. The staff shortage caused a rapid drop-off in enrolments, so that by 1999 there were fewer than 100 students and the elementary grades had been suspended.
Brothers who joined the community in 1998 and 1999 were Tony Malamo, Julian Hakumin, John Tukana and John Malina. Everyone realised the need for senior Brothers as a support for the younger ones in such an isolated environment. In 1996 Terry Kane was an ideal man for that role, as was Julian Hakumin in 1999. After Brother Terry Kane became ill and had to return to Australia for treatment, several problems arose for the young community until Julian Hakumin's appointment brought steady leadership and stability. Julian saw his contribution as re-building relationships:

When I went to Bongos, my task as community leader was to be a pastoral person and to support good relationships among the Brothers and with the people and the parish priest. At that time Father Bernard Burite, a Kairiru ex-student from Mushu Island was at Bongos, and Father Otto Separi was at Tau mission, some six hours' walk away. Father Bernard was a regular visitor to our house, joining us for a meal whenever he could. He and I sometimes made the long trek together to and from Tau Mission to catch the next available mission transport to Wewak. We certainly did enjoy each other's company. On one occasion on that trip it poured down rain, and, while we were sheltering in a small garden hut, a huge tree crashed down, destroying the hut. We just escaped in time. My heart went out to the Bongos kids. I still feel very sorry that our presence at Bongos did not work out as well as we had hoped.
Because of the problems which had been experienced, the extreme isolation, and the shortage of suitable Brothers for such a remote community, the District Council, at the end of 1998, considered withdrawing from Bongos, a proposal which was confirmed during 1999. During his visit in July 1999 the new District Leader, Brother Brendan Neily, announced to the people of Bongos that the Brothers would be leaving at the end of that year. John Tukana remembers the people's reaction to that decision and some of the benefits he experienced during his short time at Bongos. His words are an interesting reflection on the complementary yet sometimes disparate tasks of nurturing Marist life and ministering to those the system has forgotten:

Bongos really needed a school. It was the cry of the people. I can understand why they felt very depressed when we had to announce to them that 1999 was the Brothers' last year at Bongos. They wanted their children to get an education. Brendan was the one who made the announcement that we would be leaving. The people did not want to hear that kind of news. The Brothers seemed to be the only ones who were committed to the work of educating their children. There was some kind of talk about our returning at some time in the future. So the people thought that at least there was a hope that we may return. But I don't think people were happy about our departure. For the Brothers, we had to make that decision.

My experience at Bongos taught me that it is good for us to work in such places. Even today, looking at the energy our young Brothers have, I think those are the places that we should go to. If I were to go to a similar outreach community in the future, I would need someone who would be a good community leader, someone who would be supportive of the younger Brothers. When I was there, both Julian and Guy were very good in that regard. I wasn't a qualified teacher, but I did all I could about teaching the ideals I had learnt about being a Marist Brother.

These days I still talk a lot about Bongos. Even in my teaching I use examples from Bongos. I talk about the needs of the students there. I enjoyed the peacefulness of the place. It gives you more time to actually think about things, more personal space. I enjoyed that very much.

I believe some Brothers would be happy to go to places as remote as that, as long as people were welcoming, they wanted us there and we wanted to go there. Let's do it. To work in these places of great need it will be necessary to go away a little bit from the comfort of the normal schools. The challenge comes when you have to work hard to achieve your goals.
Yangoru

Within months of the withdrawal from Bongos, the District Council commissioned Brother Ian McCombie to investigate likely places for another Sepik opening, as several young Brothers would be finishing their training and would be available for ministry from the beginning of 2002. With thoroughness and enthusiasm, Ian researched likely schools where the Brothers might be able to assist. One criterion the new District Council insisted on was that the school should have reasonable road access to Wewak. After visiting many possible schools and speaking to the relevant Diocesan authorities, Ian presented a series of reports and recommendations to the District Council, who, at the end of 2001, endorsed Ian's preferred option for an opening at Yangoru. The following year Ian became superior of the new community, consisting of Brothers Zebulun Suri and Elias Warao. Brother Stanley Bakere and Brother Guy Yuangi joined the community in 2003. The national Brothers worked at either the Catholic Primary School or Yangoru High School. Following the tradition of Canute Sheehan, Kevin Mackin and Terry Kane, Ian McCombie began working with the Diocesan Catholic Education Office in 2003, in the role of Vicar for Education. District Superior, Brendan Neily, wrote in the District Newsletter after his first visit to Yangoru in 2002:

I could see a lot of potential with Yangoru. It answers many of the areas that have been recommended to us to work in. It is isolated. There are big needs. It has a shortage of teachers, both in the Community School and in the High School. The young people have a great need to be more involved with their faith, motivated to better themselves and to take on leadership roles. Yes, Yangoru is indeed Champagnat country!
Chapter 24

Creating the Dream
Goroka, Sixteen Mile and Madang
1979 – 2003

In the only article specifically dealing with “Marist Missionaries”, the Marist Brothers' Constitutions emphasizes that the task of expatriate missionaries is a temporary one and leaves no doubt about the vital role of local Brothers in assuming leadership responsibility:

Expatriates withdraw as soon as their presence is no longer needed. Local Brothers are to be encouraged to assume gradually the full responsibility for their District. It is through them that the inculturation of Marist life is to be achieved. (Article 91)

The story of this book has necessarily followed the sacrifices, adventures and life work of many expatriate Marists as they implanted the Marist dream in these Melanesian lands. As our story enters its final phase, it focuses on the efforts, from 1979 onwards, to create a Melanesian District. Quality leadership and sound formation were keys to the strategy.

It is interesting that the Marist Brothers' leaders in PNGSI chose to combine their administration centres with houses of study. Between 1979 and 2003 there have been three such houses: Goroka, Sixteen Mile and Madang. The story of the foundation of the District of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands is necessary background to the history of these “dual-purpose” centres.

The District of PNG/SI

In 1976 new Provincials were appointed in Sydney and Melbourne, Brothers Kieran Geaney and Walter Smith. Aware of a growing need among the Brothers in PNG and Solomon Islands for a unified District, they decided to visit the communities together as an indication of their
views about eventual amalgamation. As one step in this process, a combined general retreat/meeting was organised for December 1977, in which Brothers working in the District, whether from Kairiru/Wewak (“Melbourne” communities) or from Solomon Islands/Bougainville (“Sydney” communities) participated. Brother Bernard Murphy (Sydney Province) and Brother Ross Keane (Melbourne Province) were the facilitators for the meeting, which was held at Tsiroge in North Bougainville. Besides providing for the annual retreat, the purpose of the gathering was to share ideas on how the two sections of the District could work together on future projects, formation and vocations.

There were some tensions at the meeting, arising from different approaches taken at St Xavier's Kairiru and St Joseph's Rigu, different interpretations of the re-structuring of the teaching service in PNG, formation issues and even long-standing suspicions and rivalries between the Provinces of Sydney and Melbourne. Such temporary differences, although strongly felt at the time, had no lasting impact on the amalgamation process which was ultimately seen to be inevitable and beneficial for all. The meeting ended amicably enough, as reported by the Bougainvillean Brother John Kinna in the Rigu Annals of December 1977:

> The informal discussions cleared the air on preconceived ideas and rumours, leaving one with the feeling at the end that the “costly project” of fares etc. was of little account when compared to the good done and the beneficial experience of working together.

As a result of the meeting, from 1978 Brother Bertrand Webster and Brother Kevin Mackin became the first coordinators of what was to become the District. Bertrand, on a full time basis, was the coordinator of the three Sydney Province communities: Rigu, Vanga Point and Tenaru, while Kevin coordinated the Melbourne Province Sepik communities: Kairiru, Wewak, Kunjingini and Passam. Agreement was reached on collaboration in future openings and in the formation of young Brothers. Thus a house of studies was established in Goroka in 1979 and a combined community began at Par in Enga Province of the PNG Highlands in 1980. The formation of the combined District of PNGSI was imminent.
Melbourne Provincial from 1983-1989, Brother Des Crowe, explains how the formation of the new District began:

It was in the period 1977-1983, when Kieran Geaney and Walter Smith were the Australian Province, that the great geographical chasm was conquered: Brothers from the two different Provinces were gradually appointed to communities administered by the other Province. In their last years as Provincials, Walter and Kieran visited PNG/SI communities together, so they met all the Brothers and had a good picture of the overall situation. For all practical purposes the enterprise was already a joint Sydney-Melbourne effort. In 1981 Brother Jeff Crowe took over as coordinator of the entire region, and a regional Council of four Brothers was established to assist him.

Jeff Crowe, the first Regional Coordinator, and later the first District Superior, recalls his appointment and his dream at the time of the establishment of the District:

On completing my term as Tenaru headmaster, I handed over to Julian Quinlan in November 1978 and headed home to stay. At that stage I had no specific intention of returning to PNG or Solomon Islands, although my heart remained there. Kieran, the Provincial at the time, wanted me to focus on settling back into Sydney Province. I was the Religion Coordinator at Auburn in 1979 and 1980. In mid-1980 Kieran came over to Auburn one day and asked me, on behalf of himself and Walter Smith, to go to the Islands as Regional Superior from January 1981. I can still recall the thoughts and feelings that ran through me on that day. I was a bit awestruck, as I had never contemplated the position – I was only 34. I had retained great hopes for the young PNG and Solomon Brothers, who were starting to come through in some numbers, and it was very much for their sake that I accepted. The signs were pretty clear: both PNG and Solomons had moved to civil independence, and localisation was happening in many areas. Within the Church there were questions about the role of ‘missionaries’ and a desire to push local vocations. In PNG especially there was a lot of movement of trained people across the country and so the idea of our men being locked into their home areas was out of date.

The other sign of the times was internal to the Brothers. We had a number of local vocations coming through and so we had to shift the focus from running schools and education services to caring for this new life and promoting the Marist dream. Most Brothers readily gave assent to this idea but it was still foreign to them as they were so taken up with running their institutions. These were some of the thoughts that ran through my mind as I agreed to take on the role. At that stage, as I remember, there were some 50 Brothers in 11 communities.
When I arrived in PNG in 1981, I settled in Goroka at first while Bertrand set up the Port Moresby house. I did not spend a lot of time at home that year nor in the ones that followed! I moved around, explaining the hopes of setting up a region and the barebones of our structure. One of the first tasks was to elect a Council. This I talked through in each community, listening to their fears and hopes. The consensus that emerged was to have four Councillors, with Sydney and Melbourne equally represented, with two men from the Islands and two expatriates. Voting was done by post and the names came out very quickly, as I recall: Pat Howley, Bert Webster, Melchior Jalowa and John Mauro. Because I had spent so much time in the Solomons it was felt that I could well ‘represent’ their interests.

An assembly of all District Brothers was held at Bomana Seminary, near Port Moresby, in 1982. Meetings in Drummoyne and Templestowe (Sydney and Melbourne Province Headquarters respectively) drew up statutes for the new District. Following a consultative vote of the Brothers, Jeff Crowe was appointed as the first District Superior and the District was officially promulgated on 17 March 1984. The first governing body (which became known as the District Senate) comprised the two Provincials, Alman Dwyer and Des Crowe, the two Vice-Provincials, Alexis Turton and Julian Casey, and the District Superior, Jeff Crowe. Thereafter, the Senate met twice a year in Australia.

Goroka

One of Bertrand's first tasks as regional coordinator was to purchase a house for students in Goroka, where the Teachers' College was located. This College was an appropriate centre for the future training of the
PNGSI novices who numbered about fifteen at that time. Bertrand moved to Goroka and, during most of 1978, lived with the Christian Brothers' community there. He describes his early days in Goroka:

During the first year I lived with the Christian Brothers in Goroka, where I enjoyed being part of their community. There were two young Brothers there who were delightful fellows, some of their older Melanesian Brothers, along with Australians Barry Louisson, who was the Regional Superior, and Finian Markwell, who was lecturing at the Teachers' College at that stage. While based at Goroka, I travelled, visiting our Brothers at Kieta, Vanga, and Tenaru. Most of our Brothers were expatriates at that time. While in Goroka, I looked for a suitable house we could purchase. I found one near the airport, close to a community of grass-roots village people – so we were not in a “posh” part of town. Eventually we established good relationships with some of our neighbours, although my choice of location was criticised later by one Brother who found it hard coping with the noise. The purchase involved a lot of negotiating with the owner, who was a Czechoslovakian man who had a plantation, so I had to go out to his plantation to discuss the sale. When you were doing business, you had to share a beer with him, so, every time I went out, I had to have a drink of beer. I wasn't a great beer drinker - I detested it. The last day, when we signed the sale papers, I had to have two beers! Anyhow, we got the property.

The purchase of the Goroka house was possible because of an extraordinarily generous gift of $30,000 (Australian) from the Marist Fathers, given to support the formation of Religious in the Pacific region. As a simple way of recognizing this gift, the Brothers named the Goroka House Maryvale, in honour of the patron of both Congregations. The Brothers moved into the house early in 1979, when Bertrand appointed Brother Chanel Diki as the house superior. Chanel, together with Brothers Gabriel Alebeti and Chanel Suston, attended Goroka Teachers' College to gain their Diploma of Secondary Teaching, while Bertrand, as Regional Coordinator, was often absent from Goroka visiting other communities.

During the Christmas vacation period of December 1979 – January 1980 Brother Colman Carroll from Lismore, Australia, added an extension to the small house. As was his custom, Colman brought volunteers with him, including Mick Gahan, Mick Santin and Charlie Snook. These Australian volunteers made excellent progress on the extensions within the short holiday period. Colman's “holiday projects”, supported by

On departure from Goroka Airport, January 1980: Mick Santin (L) and Mick Gahan (R), with Brothers Chanel Suston and Chanel Diki.

Brother Jeffrey Crowe, the new Regional Superior who took up residence at Goroka in 1981, faced many important questions about recruitment and formation in the new District, issues which continued to occupy the agendas of successive District Councils. Fundamental to these concerns
was the varying number of candidates, the annual intake in Jeff's time as Leader ranging from nil to more than ten. The work of enthusiastic recruiters, with encouragement from supportive headmasters and other key staff members in institutions, had a significant effect on the flow of vocations. It seems that when certain key personnel moved on, the flow of vocations decreased, resulting in difficulties in planning for the provision of formation personnel and centres. Furthermore, when Brothers left the congregation, there was natural disappointment, although many former Brothers retained a strong commitment to Marist values in their life in the community or their work in education. Wise discernment of genuine vocations, nurturing vocations through sound formation programmes and dealing with the questions raised when Brothers leave the congregation are all important elements which District Superiors and Councils struggle with, as they strive to create the Marist dream in Melanesia.

Because of the ebb and flow of vocations over these years, the changing requirements for professional qualifications and the development of new centres of tertiary education, there were several changes of plan for formation in Papua New Guinea, for both postulancy and post-novitiate. The postulancy shifted from Sixteen Mile to Goroka to Wewak, while Goroka, Sixteen Mile and Madang were used as centres for post-novitiate formation at various times. The District Administration moved from Goroka to Sixteen Mile at the beginning of 1982, and remained there for the following twenty-one years.

With reduced demand for a post-novitiate study centre, the Brothers decided to lease the Goroka house to the OLSH Sisters for a period of eighteen months from the beginning of 1983. In mid-1984 Goroka was re-opened as a postulancy, with Brother Nivard Hogan as postulant master, assisted by Brother John Paul Mauro, who was also the vocation director at that time.

A decrease in the number of postulants prompted the decision to close the Goroka house and transfer the postulancy to Sixteen Mile. Maryvale was put up for sale early in 1986 and was eventually sold a year later. Meanwhile, plans were in motion for major new initiatives in post-
novitiate formation, namely a new opening at Madang in PNG, where the young Brothers would attend Divine Word Institute. Later, Laumanasa House opened at Tenaru in Solomon Islands, first as a study house for post-novices and later as a postulancy. By this time, the District Administration was well established at Sixteen Mile, Central Province, PNG.

**Sixteen Mile**

The two-hectare riverside property, nestling below the towering cliffs of Hombrum Bluff in the Laloki Valley twenty-five kilometres from Port Moresby, provided an ideal rural setting where Mark and Rosemary Lynch made their home and raised their son and two daughters in the 1970s. They named their home *Fonoko Iaga*, which is the traditional Koiari name for this piece of land. As the family was greatly attached to the property, with its river and nearby mountains, it was with some sadness that they sold the block in 1979 and returned to Australia for work reasons.

The purchasers were the Marist Brothers, who needed a base in Port Moresby as a transit centre for travellers, a residence for students and a home for someone who would attend to all the necessary business which could be done only in the capital. As the Brothers did not need the building until 1981, it was leased for a year to a builder, who constructed a toilet/shower block as his lease payment. Bertrand Webster records his arrival at Sixteen Mile to take occupancy of the house at the beginning of March in 1981:

> I flew from Goroka to Port Moresby, where I met Michael Kaminei, a former Marist Brother studying for the priesthood at Bomana Seminary. Arriving at the Franciscan Novitiate adjacent to our property, we greeted Fathers Matthias Conway and Greg Bourke, collected the keys to our house and joined the friars for prayer and the evening meal. It was the beginning of a long friendship with our Franciscan neighbours. Later, with sheets, towel and torch borrowed from the Franciscans, I retired to the empty Marist house where I spent a peaceful night. The following day the Franciscans took me to town, where I set up our bank account and attended to other business. Two days later, on Ash Wednesday, Jeff Crowe arrived from Goroka for a brief visit. The first community meal in the house comprised eggs, onion, potato chips, bread and butter – very tasty.
Until I purchased a minibus on 20 March, I was more stationary than I would have liked and I also became aware that I did not have a vocation to be a hermit. I spent most of each day clearing away vegetative growth which harboured hordes of mosquitoes. I was grateful to Father Greg and the Franciscan novices who helped me with the clearing. Some weeks later, on Easter Saturday, Brother Colman Carroll arrived from Australia, and the first Sixteen Mile community began.

As the Sixteen Mile house was to be used as a postulancy, Colman added a large accommodation wing and a chapel to the house, completing these by the end of 1982. Colman's Lismore friend, Charlie Snook, came from Australia for some weeks to assist with part of the construction, while a building company was engaged to do the exterior work on the chapel. Jeff Crowe commissioned the father of Brother Lambert Mann to carve a large wooden Sepik-style crucifix for the new chapel.

The postulancy began at Sixteen Mile on 28 June 1982, with the arrival of three postulants under the direction of Brother John Mauro. The Brothers renamed the building *Laumanasa House*, after Brother Alphonsus Laumanasa who died in Solomon Islands in 1967. Other community members in 1982 were Jeff Crowe, who had transferred from Goroka, and two student Brothers, Jerome Semos and Kevin
Marimias, both Bougainvilleans. In the early days at Sixteen Mile the postulants assisted with parish visitation in Gerehu parish in the city, while Jeff Crowe began a simple outreach to the settlement people at Nine Mile, helping to set up a small pre-school there. Other Brothers, over the following years, engaged in study at the University of PNG or at Bomana Seminary, taught at De la Salle High School Bomana or worked at the seminary. In 1986 Brother Paul Gallagher became the District Secretary, a role which included travel arrangements, passports, visas, work permits and District finances. Subsequent District Secretaries were Brothers Noel Hickey (1992), Peter Morellini (1998) and Lawrence McCane (2001).

Sixteen Mile quickly became a busy house, serving as a transit centre for numerous visitors passing through Port Moresby and as a meeting place for the District Council, for Religious from around the city and for Marist ex-students studying or working in the National Capital District. The pleasant riverside setting of the house became an attractive venue for many groups for prayer days, reunions, or weekend picnics.

Brother Des Howard, who replaced Jeff Crowe as the District Superior at the District Chapter of 1987, enjoyed living at Sixteen Mile and ensured that the community was always a welcoming place. His warm human qualities ensured excellent relationships with the local people and he maintained close friendships with many Religious and other people in Port Moresby and surrounding areas. Believing the future was in the hands of the young Melanesian Brothers, Des had a passion for providing worthwhile formative and educational opportunities for them. Almost every year he organised a programme for the young Brothers; these courses included Teacher Effectiveness Training, Celibacy, Leadership, and Melanesian Spirituality. Where appropriate, Des invited young Religious from other congregations to join in these courses. Providing suitable ongoing formation and renewal opportunities for Melanesian Brothers was a priority for Des, a policy which was continued by his successors.

Des's farewell from Sixteen Mile on 17 July 1993 was a fitting tribute to his involvement in the local community and local Church, as well as
an acknowledgement of his unreserved commitment to his Brothers in the District. The Franciscans from the nearby Novitiate prepared the farewell meal enjoyed by about forty guests.

District Superior Des Howard with Augustine, son of former Brother John Kinna, 1988
Death of Brother Frank McMahon

During Des's time as superior, Brother Frank McMahon died unexpectedly at Sixteen Mile. Des recalls the night of Frank's death, 28 July 1991:

Frank, who previously spent many fruitful years as director of Vanga Point, took over the reins as vocation promoter for the District after Chris Marden returned to Australia. After completing his term in looking after marginalized youth near Toowoomba in Queensland, Frank willingly and with great enthusiasm and energy returned to the District in this new role at the beginning of 1991. During the short time he was with us he made contact with numerous young men who were possible candidates. He travelled widely and wrote regularly to potential candidates. In mid-year he and I made our annual retreat together in the highlands, under the direction of Ben Kuhnert SVD (Novice master). Not long after the retreat, during the mid-year District Council meeting at 16 Mile, Frank's presence was very close to us as he prepared our meals, moved around the yard nearby while manhandling the old water pump (about 60kg), which he shifted to the workshop. He also spent time at his desk catching up with correspondence while waiting for the food to cook. In spite of warnings to slow down because of previous heart problems, Frank was comfortable only when operating several projects simultaneously at top speed. As was our custom, we relaxed that Saturday night with a game of Five Hundred. Frank and Herman teamed up against Terry Tanzer and me. Around 11.00 pm we were neck and neck with the outcome depending on the final hand. We bid ten no trumps (an unbeatable call, we thought). Frank wagered on open misere and we were convinced he would lose. However, the wily old card sharp won, amidst rapturous outbursts. Early the next morning (about 2.00 am) I was awakened by moaning, which, in hindsight, I believe to be Frank suffering a painful stroke. Since the noise stopped after a brief incursion, I paid no attention to it. However, at prayers the next morning when Frank did not appear (and he was an early-riser), I became concerned. I entered his room and found him dead on his bed. His arm was against his face, which showed signs of the anguish of the stroke. I alerted the community and invited the Franciscans to join us in Frank's room for the anointing by Fr Terry O'Neil OFM. We were all stunned into numbness as we stood around dear Frank's bed. From there we transported his body to the mortuary at the hospital where a post mortem confirmed the stroke that took his life. The undertaker prepared Frank's body for transport to Australia. I was on the same flight which brought Frank's body to Sydney on the following Friday (which coincided with the PNG-SI Senate meeting). On the Saturday, in a packed St Joseph's Chapel, we gave our farewell to Frank in a moving Requiem, with a fitting eulogy by Alexis, the Provincial. We had this magnificent Brother with us at Sixteen Mile for only six months.
Last Days at Sixteen Mile

One of the unforgettable characters and long-term residents of Sixteen Mile was Kairi, a settler who made his home in an abandoned minibus on the riverbank a short distance from the Brothers' house. From time to time, Kairi assisted with outside work in return for food. Although causing many problems for the Brothers in earlier years, even becoming violent at times, he mellowed as he aged, and, apart from regular requests which were sometimes excessive, he was a reasonably amicable neighbour during the Brothers' last years at Sixteen Mile.

Brothers Ray Arthur and Brendan Neily were the subsequent District Superiors who were based at Sixteen Mile. (The name of the role changed to “District Leader” in 1999). The relative isolation of the property made it an attractive target for “rascals” (PNG name for thieves or criminals) who, over the years, made several raids. During one such incident in December 1999, rascals tied up three Brothers, including Brendan, the District Leader, while they ransacked the house. Following this incursion, the District Council gave serious consideration to re-locating the District headquarters to a safer area. The murder of Father Fabian Thom OFM in the Franciscan Novitiate on the evening of 16 August 2001 added urgency to these discussions. Following this tragedy, the Brothers decided to re-locate the administration centre to the Marist House at Madang, which is located within the relatively secure compound of the Divine Word University. The Marist Community at Sixteen Mile closed on 11 December 2002.
Madang

In 1896, less than twenty years after their founding in Holland, the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) arrived in Madang, but finding a well established Lutheran mission there, moved first to Aitape and later to Alexishafen. Divine Word Institute grew out of Madang Catholic High School which opened in 1968, and was staffed mainly by SVD missionaries. From 1978, the High School classes were gradually phased out, as Divine Word Institute (DWI) was established, eventually emerging as PNG's only Catholic University in 1996.

From its beginning the Marist community at DWI catered for the continuing formation of young Melanesian Brothers. The first community in 1986 comprised Brothers Des Murphy (Superior), Clement Kapae and Emil Tong (students), Pat Howley and Herman Boyek. There were protracted negotiations with the SVDs concerning construction of a house for the Brothers. Marist authorities in Australia, who were financing the construction, were reluctant to build on land not owned by the Congregation. It took some eighteen months to reach agreement on this thorny issue, the main outcomes being a grant to the Marist Brothers of a sub-lease of the small block on which their house was to be built, and an agreement that, in the event of the departure of the Brothers, the university would arrange recompense for the house, either by purchase or renting. For the first two years the community lived in alternative accommodation supplied by DWI on the campus. Brother Frank Hough joined the community in 1987, taking over the responsibility of Master of Scholastics from Des, who continued as the Head of the Religious Studies Department.

Construction of the Brothers' house, which began on 20 July 1987, was slow at first, but by 26 November Pat Howley began moving furniture and belongings into the still unfinished house. Geoff Hough, Frank's father, visited for several months in the latter part of 1987 to assist with the construction; among other projects he took responsibility for building the workshop/storeroom under the house. To cater for a planned increase in the number of students in 1990, extensions were added to the house in the final months of 1989, while, at the end of 1990, Colman Carroll,
with assistance from Brothers Joseph McCabe, Nick McBeath and Linus Meehan, added further improvements to the house by filling in the downstairs section to create a large room used for a variety of purposes. The next extension occurred in 2002 to create space for the District Administration; at the same time the downstairs room was converted to additional bedrooms.

A new superior, Brother Brian Horton, arrived in 1991, together with Brother John Malamo to join Brother Nick McBeath, then in his fourth year teaching at DWI. Brian became a successful, witty and popular English teacher, remaining at DWI for eight years. He was on board the ill-fated Air Niugini Flight PX 128 in May 1995 when it overshot the runway to land in shallow water in the harbour. The passengers, all unharmed, were evacuated through the emergency exit, onto a wing, and through the mud to safety. Brian's story of this episode has entertained countless people ever since.

The community fulfilled its primary role as a formation house over the ensuing years, not only for full-time students studying for diplomas, but also for Brothers undertaking courses on a short-term basis between Novitiate and further studies at Marist Asia Pacific Centre in Manila, which accepted Brothers from the Pacific from 1995. Brothers served
on the DWI staff in a variety of roles, while some young Brothers taught at nearby schools for short periods. At times Brothers from other congregations joined the community while undertaking courses at DWI. Brother Brendan Neily, who joined the DWI staff as counsellor and lecturer in 1994, was elected District Leader in 1999 and transferred to Sixteen Mile, rejoining the Madang community on 11 November 2002 when the District Administration moved to Madang.

At the time of writing (2003) the Madang Community continues to play its part in creating the dream of a Melanesian Marist Brotherhood and mission, through wise leadership and sound formation, in the tradition of similar communities at Goroka and Sixteen Mile.

An important visitor in 1997
From left: Brothers Benito Arbues (Superior General), Pius Knikie CFC, John Malina, Brian Horton, John Tukana, Brendan Neily

**Bringing the Dream to Fulfilment**

The *inculturation of Marist life* in Melanesia is the dream engendered by the Marist Brothers’ Constitutions (Article 91). Gradually the dream
is being achieved. In the past there were obstacles that prevented the Melanesian Brothers assuming greater responsibility for their own District: a reluctance among the Melanesian Brothers themselves to accept leadership positions, vocation issues, high rates of departure of young Brothers, long periods in our history when no vocations were accepted and the need to balance prudence with daring in selecting Melanesian leaders. These blocks are slowly disappearing as more opportunities for Melanesian leadership emerge. With the establishment of the new District of Melanesia in 2003, the time is right for Melanesian Brothers to bring the dream to reality. The formation communities at Goroka, Sixteen Mile and Madang each played their role in preparing Melanesian Brothers for this challenge.
Chapter 25

From Founding Settlements to New Outposts
Enga Province and Western Province
1980 – 2001

With the exception of ten years in Rabaul in the 1950s, all Marist Brothers' openings in PNGSI until 1980 were in the “Marist strongholds” of Solomon Islands, Bougainville and East Sepik. The relatively large number of Brothers assigned to Tenaru, Rigu and Kairiru up to 1980 indicates that, at that time, these three foundational institutions remained the focus of Marist endeavour. It was time to heed the call of the founder, Marcellin Champagnat, who, with his passion for mission and his willingness to leave behind the security of what was familiar, declared that “our plan embraces all the world.”

Par, Enga Province

In 1980 the Marist Brothers moved into another world – the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The high ranges of Enga Province reach to almost 4,000 metres, while the densely populated valleys are mostly higher than 2,000 metres. These mountains are the source of streams which become PNG's greatest rivers, including the mighty Sepik and Fly. Inhabited for more than 12,000 years, this region of PNG became known to Europeans only in 1938 and it was only in October 1947 that the first missionaries (Divine Word priests, Fathers Ross and Bus) arrived in Enga, four months after the area was “officially opened” by the colonial administrators.

On arrival in Enga, Papua New Guinea's highest and coldest Province, the Marist Brothers encountered aspects of highland life which differed in many ways from the mostly coastal cultures among which the Brothers had worked from 1938: smoke filtering lazily through the neatly thatched grass roofs of round-shaped village houses and rising into the crisp
mountain air; the colour and spectacle of highland singsings; fierce tribal fighting characteristic of this culture. Into this fascinating world arrived four Marist newcomers: Brothers Bryan Leak, Jerome Semos, Felix Koneana and John Lunga. The foundation of the community was unique in that the Superior General, Basilio Rueda, visiting from Rome, accompanied the Brothers when they first arrived at Par on 16 January 1980.

The 1980 school year opened with Jerome and Bryan at the nearby Wabag Government High school, and Felix and John at the Catholic community school at Par. Wabag is the Provincial Capital, about three kilometres by road from Par. This was the pattern for the eleven years the Brothers worked at Par, some working at Wabag High and some at the local Catholic community school. Later, Brother Terry Kane worked for two years at the Wabag Catholic Education Office as a support person.
for Religious Education, and served for a time as chairman of the Catholic Education Board; Brother Leo McVeigh later did similar work in the Diocese. Brother Kevin Agnew worked as Diocesan Secretary in the late 1980s, while Brother Chris Marden worked at the nearby Yampu Health Centre for some years and later served as Catholic Health Secretary. While at Yampu, Chris specialised in the treatment of leprosy and did patrols around the villages treating patients.

The diversity of Engan life and ministry is exemplified by the following extract from the District Newsletter of September 1984, which Brother Jeff Crowe wrote from Par:

Chris Marden is hammering away in the background, renovating the chapel in his usual excellent style. Felix Koneana has just returned to class for the last session of the week, after which he intends to shepherd the stubborn, dirty...
students down to the river for a wash. Terry Kane is in his office in town, filling in for the Bishop, who is overseas. Terry Tanzer is in court today, giving evidence against teachers from another school who were active in a stone fight at Wabag High School a few weeks back. Leo Maia is in class and then will be assisting in the preparations for the school cultural display next week. Just an ordinary day in Enga – smoke drifting across the valley from the houses being burned by the police because of tribal fighting.

Brother Ray Arthur spent two years at Par. He recalls some of his experiences:

I really liked Wabag. It was quite a different place altogether, very different from Buin, where I had been before. The Highlands was an extraordinary place. In spite of its poor reputation, I really enjoyed living in the Highlands. I had a Level Three position at Wabag High School at the time; I worked closely with the principal and deputy and, at the same time, I worked with staff and student leaders. We lived at Par, which was about 10 minutes drive from Wabag. It was also good to live away from the school. Sometimes we used to walk down the hill to the school at Wabag. I would often meet people on the road, and say, Yongamao [good morning – Ray Arthur knows the greeting words of numerous PNG languages]. In class, the students were receptive and ready to learn. That year was probably the best teaching year I ever had in my teaching life. All three of my Grade Ten Mathematics classes achieved extraordinary results at the end of the year, more than half of them gaining either distinctions or credits. The Highland students were good at Mathematics and were really motivated to learn.

I did a fair bit of travelling around the Highlands. I remember one trip I did with a group of students, right up into the mountains, staying at their small villages. That was a good way to understand something of the Highlands culture.

The tribal fighting was an interesting Highlands experience. Sometimes we went up to visit some of the tribal fighting, just to sit down and watch them fighting each other. Whenever you encountered a tribal fight by chance on the road, particularly if you were new to the Highlands, they would just say, “Stop, let the Brothers go past.” Both sides would stop, we would go past, then they'd resume their fighting. At one stage I was visiting Kompiam to visit the family of some of the students. I was just about to walk up the hill to shake hands with some of the fathers when they all turned around and started running down the hill towards me. I had to hide behind a tree. They were having a court case, and, unhappy with the outcome, rushed to get their spears, bows and arrows. I just hid behind the tree as they went rushing past. That was a bit scary. They weren't chasing me; they were chasing each other. I just happened to be right in the middle of what was going on. Actually, while in the Highlands, I never experienced any fear.
Beating the Roadblock

Friday nights at Par were a special community time. “There was nothing else to do, unless we went to join a tribal fight somewhere!” Brother Ken McDonald quipped. The potbelly stove in the community room provided warmth during the cold highland evenings. Chris Marden and the Brothers liked a drink on Friday night, but unfortunately there was a liquor ban in Enga Province at the time. Chris, being the Catholic Health Secretary for Enga Diocese, travelled to Mount Hagen for meetings occasionally, which gave him the opportunity to pick up a bottle or two, as there was no liquor ban there.

On one occasion Chris bought his supplies and, knowing the vehicle would be searched at the border roadblock, hid the few bottles under the passenger seat. He picked up Sister Ingeborg SSpS, who wanted to return to Enga with him, and, without telling her about the hidden booty, invited her to sit on the seat under which it was hidden. Her long habit ensured the bottles were not visible. At the roadblock the police inspected the vehicle, checked the boot, and asked, “Are you carrying any alcohol?” Sister was indignant. “We are Religious people; I certainly
would not be travelling in a vehicle which is involved in trafficking liquor.” Chris was silent; the officer waved them through the roadblock.

Arriving at the convent, Sister left the vehicle. Chris lifted the seat and gave her one of the bottles, “Thanks for hiding the grog, Sister!” The good nun punched Chris jokingly on the arm – “Jesus and all his holy angels, I didn't know you had that!” But she gratefully accepted the gift.

Par Brothers 1990 with visiting Councillor General
From Left: Brothers Canute Sheehan, Clement Kapae (from Enga), Ken McDonald, Richard Dunleavy (Councillor General)

Closure of the Par Community

At the end of 1990 several national Brothers left the Congregation, creating such a shortage of personnel that it was impossible to maintain all existing openings. As a result, the District Council decided to close the Par community at the end of that year. During its eleven years of
existence, the Par community was home to more than twenty Brothers, almost all of whom speak highly of the people, the place and the work. Brother Ken McDonald, who worked in Par for four years, comments about his time there:

After two years in PNG, I went up to Wabag and I lost my heart. I liked Wabag. I was looking for “more” and at Wabag there was more. There was a far greater need for Brothers. I could give more at Wabag than I could at my previous school. It was tougher, and I felt I was doing something that not many other people would want to do. I enjoyed it because I liked the students and I seemed to have more in common with the other people who worked for the Church there. There was much more communication with the local people and there was more of a sense of being part of a wider Church.

District Superior, Des Howard, wrote in the District Newsletter of October 1990:

Last weekend I was in Par to dialogue with Church and school authorities about our withdrawal at the end of the year. I received a delegation of students from Wabag High School who pleaded for us to give them Brothers for next year. The sisters and priests were also hoping for a reversal of our decision. However, the people have accepted the inevitable with disappointment. The principal wrote a letter in which he outlined the powerful contribution of the Brothers.

In an accompanying letter “to the Brothers only” (10 October 1990) Des gave some details about the five young Brothers who left the Congregation in 1990, explained that in such circumstances it was impossible to sustain a community at Par, and expressed the hope that the departure from the Highlands would be “for a limited time”. The Brothers' efforts to “reach out to all the dioceses of the world” are indeed fragile and tentative, dependent on many human factors. Nonetheless, the call to outreach, to dare to go beyond is always with us. The remainder of this chapter describes some other ventures into new outposts.

**Brother Kevin Murray's Work in the PNG Highlands**

From 1985 to 1987 Kevin worked with the Goroka Rehabilitation Centre in supporting youths on probation. Kevin worked mainly in the Daulo
Pass area, a spectacular, rugged area of the Eastern Highlands not far from Goroka, from where the Highlands Highway snakes its way up the steep pass to reach the summit at 2500 metres above sea level. It is a notorious area for hold-ups by rascal bands. It was among these rascals that Kevin worked for three years.

The coordinator of the Rehabilitation Centre, Mrs Lynn Giddings, wife of the Goroka Magistrate, wrote in appreciation of Kevin's contribution:

We call Brother Kevin our “gift from heaven”. He comes with fifteen years' experience in vocational work in Solomon Islands. He has become the waspapa [guardian] of the Daulo Pass groups, where he spends most of his time, preferring to work with the people in their gardens and projects to sitting behind a desk in town. Youth from Daulo Pass have come to town especially to thank us for sending Brother Kevin.

Kevin's patience, compassion and practical skills helped him to gain the confidence of the young men of Daulo Pass and his work with them was successful, not only in helping to rehabilitate numerous rascals but also in improving the law and order situation at Daulo, as Mrs Giddings reported in 1985:

The committee has been advised by the Highway Patrol that the situation has improved on Daulo Pass and we believe that this is largely due to the presence of Brother Kevin in the community. It again shows that establishing relationships and showing interest in people goes a long way to improving the law and order situation.

Kevin describes some of his experiences on the Pass in 1985:

I'm enjoying my work up in the mountain villages of Daulo Pass, 2,500 metres above sea level. I go out on patrol most days, sometimes into isolated areas on steep mountain slopes where people have not seen a visitor in months. I find I'm always welcome among these people, who are surprised to find that someone from another country is so concerned about them. I have my share of setbacks and disappointments: for example when one of my rascals, a good friend, ran off with some of my money; or the many times when young men beg me to find work for them and there is just no work about. I work in the courts a fair bit, as well as helping out with Probation, interviewing people who want to share their problems with me. Recently, I was happy to be able to help a ten-year-old kid who was given ten months in prison for a minor offence. I spoke to the
welfare officer and the sentence was reduced to a month. Then I was able to secure the release of a young Daulo Pass man by bringing in witnesses and proving his innocence. We are trying to help people to find a fulfilling and rewarding life on the land and I am happy to be working closely with the people here.

Kevin Murray at Pompabus, Enga Province, 2001

After leaving Goroka, Kevin moved to Par where for some years he joined the Par Pastoral Centre as a “field worker for community development”. Kevin described his work at the Pastoral Centre at Par:

My main task is to try to influence the young people to become more self-reliant. One of our projects is the development of a “seed bank” where people may borrow various types of seeds, especially potatoes, as long as they agree to return them “with interest”, i.e., surplus produce. I am finding that the participants quickly develop self-reliance and cooperation among themselves. I'm encouraging sustainable methods of farming and in this way we are taking some small steps towards authentic human development through agriculture here in Enga.
From 1999 to 2001 Kevin returned to Enga where he worked at Pompabus Vocational school, firstly as a full-time volunteer teacher in 1999, then, when the school closed due to tribal fighting in the area, he remained as a consultant and a presence among the local people, living simply and advising on sustainable farming methods. Kevin returned to Australia in 2001, after a remarkable contribution of twenty-eight years working among the people of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Kevin Hogan and Colman Carroll in Daru–Kiunga Diocese, Western Province

Brother Kevin Hogan pioneered Marist associations with the Daru-Kiunga Diocese when Bishop Deschamps invited him to assist in financial management in 1987. Aged sixty-three, Kevin had already spent nine years in the District - at Kairiru, Tenaru, Kieta and Sixteen Mile, expertly fulfilling the role of bursar at each place. Kevin's financial work at Bomana Seminary came to the attention of Bishop Deschamps, who personally invited him to Kiunga, where Kevin lived with the De Montfort priests' community. After two years of effective work in Kiunga, Kevin returned to Australia for some specialist medical treatment.

Brother Colman's achievements and contributions to the District, spread over almost fifty years, have been documented in earlier chapters. Kiunga was his final venture into Papua New Guinea where, scattered over the far-flung Diocese, stand many buildings which he designed and trained his team of helpers to erect. His last and biggest project in Kiunga was the Peter To Rot Formation Centre, designed as a residential training and conference centre, primarily for the formation of lay people. Bishop Deschamps and his successor, Bishop Gilles Côté, recognized the treasure they had acquired when Colman arrived. Later, Colman accepted an invitation from Bishop Gilles to accompany him on a holiday to his native Canada. Due to failing health, Colman left PNG in 1997 to return to Australia where he died at Ashgrove, Queensland, in September of that year.
In 2003 Bishop Côté wrote, recalling his friendship with Colman:

He was loved by all the missionaries and the people. He shared his wisdom with us and was a sure example of courage, commitment and prayer life. We all learned so much from him and he contributed much to the life of our community. One thing I regret is that we were unable to keep the Marist Brothers with us in the Diocese.

**Tarakbits Refugee Camp**

From 1991-1998 Brother Jeff Crowe was a member of the National Committee of Australian Catholic Relief (now known as Caritas Australia). As part of a delegation representing that organisation, Jeff visited the refugee camps in the Irian Jaya border area of West Sepik (Sandaun) Province in August 1984. At the time there was a fear that the Indonesian military would carry out reprisals against the refugees in the camps, forcing them to return to the areas from which they had fled. The PNG Government did not have the resources to assist the refugees, but the Church provided some limited relief. Later, when border crossers set up camps in Western Province, a similar humanitarian crisis loomed.
The urgent needs were food, medical attention and schools. When Bishop Deschamps invited the Brothers to help at Tarakbits refugee camp, Jeff asked Brother Chris Marden to assist. Chris, a recently qualified nurse with a wide range of skills, was an ideal choice. He arrived at Tarakbits in October 1984. With no other trained medical personnel to help, Chris's skills were in great demand; his workload was heavy and exhausting. Brother Julian Hakumin, who joined Chris in November, recalls some of their experiences in the refugee camp:

When Bishop Deschamps made the request for Brothers to go to Tarakbits, I had just completed the semester at UPNG after my two years of study there. I was to join Br. Chris Marden who for several weeks had already been working at the camp as the Medical Officer. My main task was to establish a school for the refugee children.

We flew first to Kiunga where we collected some basic resources for teaching and the next day we flew in a twin-engine light aircraft to Tarakbits, just a few kilometres from the Indonesian border. The small airstrip had been built by the refugees themselves to enable them to receive food and medical assistance, but in fact little arrived. So the Catholic Mission had to do something to contain the overcrowding and improve the appalling conditions in the refugee camp. There was no road access to the camp; the only way was by light aircraft, a twenty-five minute flight from Kiunga. Alternatively, you had to drive for seventy-four kilometres from Kiunga to the Ok Tedi River (the only good road in the Province), then walk for seven hours to Tarakbits, passing a few villages on the way.

The parents had already constructed the school, a simple bush-materials building with a blue tarpaulin roof, divided into two rooms by another tarpaulin. Over the first weekend I organised the enrolments. By Monday the list of enrolments was complete and the children could not wait to start. These children had been in school in West Papua but their education was disrupted when Indonesian soldiers raided their areas. Our little school was their next hope of some kind of education.

We had one hundred children, sixty in my class, ranging from Grades One to Five, while my assistant had forty students in Grades Six, Seven and Eight. We spread another blue tarpaulin on the dirt floor for the children to sit on and use as their desk. We had few resources but the children were happy just being in school with the privilege of having two people to teach them each day. Our students even asked if they could also have class on Saturdays.

We had an hour of organised sports each day, basically ball games, including cricket. With a single tennis ball and cricket bats fashioned from coconut palm
trunks, the kids enjoyed every minute of it. After sports in the hot sun it was “swim time” for everyone, including the teachers, in the cool water of the river, a five-minute walk from the camp.

Chris Marden was fully occupied with the health of the very sick ones in the camp. There were several deaths, mostly among the older people; Chris and I were present at all these burials. On occasions young children were at risk of dying from malnutrition or dysentery. Somehow Chris, with his much-rationed medical supply, managed to stop the spread of dysentery in the camp.

A priest from the nearby parish visited us once, just to see how things were. This was our only Mass during our stay at the camp. We estimated the total number of refugees at about one thousand, although the number varied from week to week. There were a lot of people coming and going across the border. Chris and I were not there to be involved in the politics but solely to attend to their health, social needs and education of their children.

Unfortunately, we could not continue work at the camp, as the Brothers had envisaged only a short stay to help out in the emergency. There was much sadness when the refugees learnt that we had to leave them. The parents were especially disappointed, as there was no more schooling for their children. I was also very disappointed to leave the children after starting our little school there.

The Tarakbits camp continued until 1988 when most of the refugees moved to the UNHCR Relocation Camp at Iowara where, at the time of writing (2003), the Daru-Kiunga Diocese continues to provide full medical and educational services. A smaller number of refugees settled near the border area about three hours walk from Tarakbits where they are medically served by the Catholic Diocese's medical staff working at the health sub-centre at Tarakbits. The Catholic Sacred Heart Parish serves the Ningerum people of the Tarakbits area. The Marist Brothers have not been involved in this work since the departure of the Brothers in December 1984.

Reaching out to new outposts in Melanesia is a difficult undertaking - not for the faint hearted. The tensions between audacity and conservatism, between rashness and prudence are part of any such decision, and ultimately, outreach projects depend on the availability of enough people with the willingness and skills to undertake such work. The wisdom of leaders in listening to and weighing the voices of the
prophets among us is paramount, as is the ever-present call to go beyond the founding settlements, to “stand in solidarity”, to “love the places which enable us to share with the poor.” (FMS Constitutions #34)
Chapter 26

Rigu – The Final Years
1976 – 1993

The headmasters in the final years of Rigu were Brothers John Paul Mauro (1976-1980), Peter Page (1981-83), Bertrand Webster (1984-1985), Bryan Leak (1986-1987) and Julian Hakumin (1988-1990). During these years the community was fully involved with the High School at Rigu and, from 1979 to 1983, Brother Bernard Kangku taught at the Community School at Tubiana, immediately adjacent to the Rigu campus.

The First Bougainvillean Headmaster

John Mauro's appointment as headmaster of St Joseph's Rigu in 1976 was a significant move for the Brothers, who felt that, after almost thirty years of Australian headmasters, the time was right for a Bougainvillean to take over the school. Indeed, all over the newly independent nation of PNG similar moves towards localisation of school leadership were occurring. To prepare future national headmasters the PNG Education Department sponsored a series of courses which were conducted in Australia by the Australian School of Pacific Administration, a division of the Department of External Territories. Brother Bertrand Webster arranged for John Mauro to participate in one such course in 1974. John reminisces about this course which he found helpful, enjoyable and informative, in more ways than one:

Sixteen of us went to Australia to undertake a course which would prepare us to become school principals or deputies. During the six-month course I got to know Peter Baki well. He and I did the course together and he is now [2002] the Secretary for Education in PNG. We became good friends in Sydney. The course was held at a place called Bobbin Head. We used to sleep in different parts of Mosman and go by bus to Bobbin Head to attend classes. I stayed with the Brothers' community in Mosman where Brother Bernard Murphy looked after me well.
The course was excellent, and we all enjoyed it and learned a lot about administration. There was a good spirit among the sixteen Papua New Guineans and we felt that we were preparing for something special. We took part in everything, especially entertaining visitors. We put on our cultural dances. When we went out to visit other schools, we were able to see headmasters in action. If they asked us to do something cultural, then we would put on some kind of singsing.

During this time I became aware of something that I did not experience when I was in Australia in the 1950s training to become a Marist Brother. I realised there were pamuk meris [prostitutes] in Australia. As time went on I used to call in at the hostel where some of the teachers were sleeping, and sometimes I would see some ladies who came in to spend the night with our teachers. Many of these men had left their sweethearts or wives at home and so, during the six months we spent down there, I suppose some would find ways to overcome their loneliness. It was an eye-opener to me. Not long after our course began a doctor gave us a talk, warning of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. The doctor advised us to take precautions against catching these diseases if ever we invited these women to our houses. He suggested we should nominate a person who would take care of the condoms and medicines. The teachers voted for me and I didn't know what I should do. My best friend Peter Baki came to me and said, “Brother John, don't you worry about that, they are all grown-up men. They can look after themselves.” So that was what happened. Each man for himself. I was very relieved then.

On his return to Bougainville, Brother John's training was called on when he was invited to become the first national headmaster of Rigu. John continues his story:

After six months we returned to our schools. As soon as I came back to Rigu, Brother Bertrand asked me to work as a deputy for a while. And then, soon after that, they asked me to take over as headmaster of Rigu High School. When I took over in 1976, I was happy to see the inspector coming to visit my school. It was none other than Mr Peter Baki, who was my friend at the headmaster's course. So, with Peter Baki, we got on very well. He was critical of many things. I reacted against all this criticism. He said to me, “Brother John, if your school was not running well, I wouldn't criticise it much. But, because it is running well, I criticise it, picking up these small points, hoping that it will get even better than it is.” So that was encouraging for me and for the teachers, who noted that our school was running just as well as it had under Brother Bertrand Webster. The teachers were happy and my students were happy. Peter Baki was always happy when he came to our school. He showed that by occasionally taking me to Kieta to the hotel, where we would buy a couple of drinks, sit in his room, sharing stories about our training and our families. He was a very good inspector and a helpful one.
The Mabiri Project

Land was a precious resource at the Rigu campus; no spare land was available for gardens immediately adjacent to the school. Until the late 1960s Rigu used Diocesan land at Toniva, just south of Rigu, for growing vegetables. At that time the Government decided to move its administration from Sohano Island in the north to Central Bougainville, a decision taken independently of Bougainville Copper's plan to develop the town of Arawa. When Government authorities were looking for land in Central Bougainville for a residential area, Bishop Lemay sold the Toniva land, creating a problem for Rigu's food production. As an alternative, the Bishop promised that Diocesan land at Mabiri, about sixty kilometres north of Kieta would be available for garden production for the school. The Diocesan Brothers' Congregation, Brothers of St Joseph (BSJ), worked the farm and the mission boats transported produce to Rigu. By 1976 the demands on Mission boats and the inconvenience of such transport created difficulties. About that time the main highway from Central Bougainville to the northern end of the Island was constructed, enabling road transport to be used for carrying garden produce from Mabiri to Rigu. Bishop Lemay therefore requested the school to take responsibility for the Mabiri garden.

Brother Terry Tanzer, who arrived at Rigu in 1975, looked after the Mabiri gardens and made frequent trips, assisted by Brother Chris Marden and, later, Brother Mark Humphries. Although some locals were employed to work on the farm, adequate supervision from distant Rigu was difficult and the occasional theft of produce from the gardens occurred. In 1978 a grant from Australia was used to purchase a large truck for the Mabiri Project.

A significant development occurred in 1980 with the beginning of a Year Eight programme which involved groups of forty students, on a rotating basis, residing at Mabiri for several weeks each term. The course at Mabiri was designed to teach appropriate skills for students returning to village life. At that time about one third of students left school after Grade Eight. However, the course was designed for all students, not only those who would complete their schooling in Year
Eight. Therefore, normal academic subjects continued at Mabiri, although with reduced time allocation. Most daytime classes covered agriculture, building skills, gardening, raising animals, and building village-style accommodation. Other staff who assisted with the project in later years included Brothers Reginald Ferrendiere, Ian McCombie, Chris Marden, Bernard McGrath, Bryan Leak, Felix Koneana and Mr Bruno Idioi, a local Nasioi man who was the farm manager for some years.

Brother Ian McCombie describes the rationale and approach of the Mabiri Project as it operated in the mid 1980s:

A big need at that time was to do something about the Grade Eight leaver situation. So we decided we would make Grade Eight leavers the thrust of Mabiri. We would aim to teach all Grade Eights something that would make them useful when they left school, whether it be at the end of Grade Eight or Grade Ten. The programme had several aspects to it: agriculture, building with both traditional and western materials, small business management, and self-esteem. We developed a series of units, each one of three weeks' duration. (Each class came up for three weeks on rotation each term.) For example, for the unit “Poultry”, we used that theme in every subject. In Science, we covered the biology of chickens and birds in general. Commerce lessons covered how to run a chicken business and how to keep the accounts. In English, we wrote business letters about ordering chickens and chicken feed. In Practical Skills, we built the chicken houses. Agriculture was the subject in which we taught how to raise the chickens. The next term there would be a new topic, e.g. cocoa or pigs.

In 1986 some extra funding for the project became available through the nationally sponsored Secondary Schools Community Education Programme (SSCEP) which promoted the objectives the Brothers had already established at Mabiri. With some interruptions, the Mabiri project continued until St Joseph's Rigu closed in 1990. Throughout the period excess farm produce was sold at roadside stalls or to the Panguna Mine to assist the financing of the project. In 1988 it was thought that Mabiri would be a good place to set up a Marist training house (postulancy). To that end Chris Marden and his helpers constructed a large house with eight bedrooms. Soon after the building was completed, the Bougainville Crisis erupted and the building was never used for its intended purpose. When Mabiri Education Centre opened on the site in 1999, this building became the Brothers' residence.
The Last Rigu Building Projects

During Peter Page's time as headmaster, a double-storey brick building was constructed, a dormitory/classroom block in the traditional Rigu design of dormitories above classrooms. This was the first dormitory/classroom block at Rigu to be constructed in brick. A similar adjoining block was added some years later. A modern dining room block, completed in 1990, was never fully operational because the Bougainville Crisis caused the closure of the school.

Onset of the Bougainville Crisis

Stewart Tapuri, from Paruparu in the mountains near Panguna, was a Year Seven student at Rigu in 1990, the final year of operation of the school. With numerous other young men in similar situations, he joined the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) after the closure of the school and in 2000 was able to resume his schooling at the recently opened Mabiri Education Centre. His story, typical of hundreds of others, captures something of the tragedy of these events:

I came from Paruparu to Rigu in 1990. I’d never been down to Arawa town and I’d never seen Panguna mine. As a small boy, I was anxious when I came down from my village, because there were so many cars to see and so many people in the town. When I arrived at the school I was very amazed to see so many white men there. I was nervous about speaking English with them. I can't remember all their names, except for Brother Bryan Leak, who was the deputy. The lay teachers at that time were all Bougainvilleans. I remember Vincent Soli from Buka, Wilfrid Lessi and his wife Rita, and Paul Lapun from Siwai. Brother Julian Hakumin was headmaster. I liked all those teachers; they taught us many interesting things and I was very happy at Rigu. During Term One school went on as normal. Many of the white people were leaving the island at that time, because the mine had closed, and the police and army were getting ready to leave Bougainville. There were just a few small disturbances at the school during that term caused by some of the BRA who came to steal the cars from the school, but the BRA Commander, Ishmael Toroama, stopped them. We went home for the Term One holidays, but when we returned, Brother Julian told us to go back to our villages for the time being. Some of our belongings had been stolen during the holidays. The power was off and some of us thought that was the reason for the school closing – no fuel at Loloho power station. But maybe there were other reasons why the school closed. Anyway, the school never re-opened after that. I went back to the village, joined the BRA and stayed in the bush fighting. I grew up in the bush with the big boys.
I was very sad at that time because my education had been blocked. I believed I didn't have a future. When I was in the bush staying with the BRAs, I heard that some BRAs burned down our school and that made me very sorry. When I heard that Mabiri was open, I made up my mind to come out of the bush and attend school in 2000. I was very pleased.

As already noted in Chapter 12, the complete story of the Bougainville Crisis is beyond the scope of this book. A brief background, necessary to understand the events surrounding the closure of St Joseph's Rigu, is given here.

A “new” Panguna Landowners' Association (PLA) was formed in 1987, comprising people who were not satisfied with the existing compensation arrangements between the “old” Association and Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL). A significant person associated with the new Association was Rigu ex-student, Francis Ona, who, until 1988, was employed at Panguna Mine as a haul-truck operator. When the PLA made a new series of claims against BCL, the PNG Government commissioned a new inquiry into the impact of the mine's operation. On 18 November 1988, Ona, dissatisfied with the resulting report, stormed out of a public meeting at Arawa at which the report was presented and never again returned to his job at the mine.

That evening, during an interview on the national broadcaster NBC, Ona informed listeners that the PLA had decided to force the closure of the mine. Four days later, a large amount of explosives was stolen from a mine storehouse, and on 26 November, a pylon, carrying the power line from the power station to the Panguna mine site was blown up, toppling it and cutting off the power necessary to operate the mine. Some days later the power was restored, only to have it disrupted again within twenty-four hours by another toppled pylon. Simultaneously, various other acts of sabotage hampered the mine's operations. A large contingent of police from mainland PNG, dispatched to quell the saboteurs' activities, imposed and vigorously enforced a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Francis Ona and his band of supporters disappeared into the mountains southeast of Panguna, in the Kongara area, from where future operations against the mine were coordinated. At some point the purpose of the conflict widened from sabotage against the mine to include the
During the first half of 1989 every attempt to re-start the mining operation was met with further sabotage. In June of that year, Prime Minister Namiliu declared his Government's intention to “deal with the Panguna criminals”, and backed the threat with a huge escalation of police and defence force operations in Central Bougainville. During the following months, the war atrocities, which were perpetrated by both sides and became a regrettable characteristic of the crisis, began in earnest.

In September 1989 the company decided to halt all attempts to re-open the mine and began repatriation of all non-Bougainvillean mine personnel. By February of the following year this withdrawal of company personnel was all but complete. A ceasefire was brokered in March 1990, and within several weeks all Government forces, police military and correctional service officers, had been withdrawn, leaving the BRA in apparent control of the entire islands of Bougainville and Buka. Francis Ona had difficulty in controlling his troops and considerable looting of premises and terrorizing of civilians resulted. In May 1990, attempting to force a return to PNG control, the Government imposed a blockade on Bougainville, preventing shipping and airlines from servicing the island. On 17 May Francis Ona unilaterally declared that Bougainville was independent of Papua New Guinea. In August 1990 the New Zealand brokered “Endeavour Accord” promised a speedy end to the blockade. The agreement collapsed within weeks, and although the blockade had been officially lifted, in reality it persisted, as services were restored only gradually. In October 1990 the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) returned, first to Buka Island, and soon after, to Bougainville. During this time fierce conflicts continued between different groups of Bougainvilleans. “Care centres” were established at several locations on the island to provide refuge for many displaced villagers. Many others abandoned their homes and fled to more secluded locations to avoid the conflict. In spite of repeated attempts at peace negotiations, the conflict continued until January 1998, when the “Lincoln Agreement” effectively ended nine years of civil war. The ceasefire came into force in May of that year, and an
international group of unarmed “peace monitors” was invited to assist in observing the peace process.

Crisis Years at St Joseph's Rigu

As 1989 progressed, staff and students followed the ominous events in and around the Panguna mine with growing alarm, although the school year progressed smoothly enough. The school community, along with most Bougainvillians, believed that these problems, although serious, would be resolved in time. Few foresaw the calamity about to envelop the island.

In January 1990 a group of militants (BRA) briefly occupied Toniva, resulting in a prompt retaliation from the PNG Defence Force. The gunfire exchange, grenade explosions and misdirected mortars landing in the harbour close to the school were quite terrifying for all Rigu and Toniva residents. It was soon after this incident that Michael Chan and his family, long-time friends of the Brothers, abandoned their home and store at Toniva and left Bougainville.

In 1990 St Joseph's High School opened with reduced numbers of students and staff, as the escalating war affected people's ability to move freely around the island. By March there were seven classes (previously there were twelve) and eleven teachers. It was at this time that Brother Bryan Leak, the Deputy Headmaster, began regular correspondence with Brother Des Howard, the District Superior, and with Marist Brothers in Australia. In his long letters, Bryan described everyday life at Rigu during the Crisis years, providing news of the Brothers and the daily progress of the war. This remarkable record of central Bougainville events at the height of the Crisis continued for three years, until Bryan's evacuation from the island in dramatic circumstances in December 1992. There were periods when, in spite of Bryan's contacts and resourcefulness, it was impossible to find ways to get his letters off the island. Nevertheless, Bryan continued writing, and, when opportunities arose, a thick bundle of hand-written manuscripts would be secretly dispatched via safe hands, often through Solomon Islands. These
priceless records provide a detailed picture of the last days of St Joseph's Rigu.

In 1990 the Rigu Marist community consisted of Brothers Gonzaga Nabbs, Bryan Leak and Julian Hakumin at Rigu, while Brothers Bernard McGrath and Felix Koneana were living at Mabiri. During the first term classes continued amid great uncertainty. For example, when services were withdrawn, and Francis Ona declared Bougainville an independent nation in May, the Grade Tens, realising there would be little chance of completing the PNG examinations, were in grave doubt about their educational future. Taking the examinations was never a possibility, as the school closed soon afterwards. For a time during the second term Bryan assisted with some part-time teaching at Arawa High School which, at that stage, was still operating with reduced staff.

Rigu's headmaster, Brother Julian Hakumin, explains that, in the circumstances of the Crisis, there was no possibility of continuing normal school operations; however, the forced closure of the school was a sad decision, one that still stirred emotions many years later:

When I reflect on these events so many years later, I still feel emotional, with some tears in me. I think it's because I still have a soft spot for Rigu as a Catholic High School which provided a good education for all Bougainville students, no matter where they came from, and gave them sound direction and meaning for their life. When we had to close Rigu, something important died on Bougainville.

Early in 1990 Julian travelled to Buka, was stranded there for some time, and while he was driving back, his utility was commandeered by a BRA group, further delaying his return. The vehicle was sighted later but never recovered. Later, Julian returned to Buka and was once again stranded there for several months due to the dangers of highway travel.

At Rigu the Brothers joined with other mission personnel (priests, CSN Sisters and BSJ Brothers) for daily evening prayer in Tubiana cathedral. No doubt their prayers often centred on the worsening situation on their island.
In his spare time, Bryan, with many helpers, began scavenging valuable materials from businesses which had been deserted by their expatriate owners. He took particular responsibility for trying to safeguard the store and personal possessions of Michael Chan's family. Bryan's aim was to protect the stock of numerous stores from rampaging looters. In time, every available secure space in the Brothers' house and the school was packed with these valuable store goods. In the end, it was to no avail, as the school itself was looted and burned after Bryan's departure in 1992. However, these “collections” provided some temporary benefits for the Brothers, as Bryan explains in his letter of 27 April 1990:

Meanwhile, all has not been sackcloth and ashes. We have inherited various good things as businesses close down and people depart. We have good supplies of frozen meat and enjoy a leg of lamb once a week. We don't have champagne breakfasts but we are equipped for a couple at least. The BCL wine cellar still has a few bottles. The catering firm is selling us eleven-litre tins of ice cream at K5 so we regularly enjoy the treat. Assorted tinned food from Chan's provides a back-up, with Peking Curried Duck being the last resort. Fresh fish abound nearby but seem to elude our experts. One sign of the times is a mouldy mailbag which has lain unused for six weeks. There must be a stack of our mail somewhere, waiting for the good times to return.

Two months later the situation was more serious. By this stage there were no students at Rigu; they had been told to wait at home after the first term holidays. Regular school never resumed, although at times limited classes were held for small groups during the following two years. In June the electricity supply ended. Arawa town was virtually deserted, with no electricity, water or sewerage services operating. The school's small generator was useful, but fuel was short:

Petrol and diesel stocks have now run out. Soon transport will be at a standstill – any moving vehicle will be a target for fine collectors or vehicle collectors. Fortunately, we have a pleasant coastal location to walk around. We have a good stock of baked beans, spaghetti, tinned meat and fish, some rice and kaukau (sweet potato), but no sugar, cordial, beer, eggs or fresh meat.

The Brothers' situation, including their diet, gradually became much worse over the ensuing months. There were occasional security scares at the school in 1990 when rascal groups attempted to steal from the collection of store goods that Bryan held in “protective custody”. A big
advantage for the Brothers was that the Area Commander of the BRA was Rigu ex-student from 1985, Joseph Siraona, and many of the BRA security patrols were ex-students as well. In this way problems could be reported and effectively dealt with by higher-ranking sympathetic BRA officials. Later in the year however, a Kongara BRA group came in at night and demanded that the group of girls, students from Nissan Island who were staying in the mission, be given to them. Shots were fired into water tanks, Brothers were threatened and the Sisters were terrified by demands that they come out of their house. Fortunately, the intruders left without carrying out their worst threats. Shortly after, the Brothers were relieved when they were able to take the Nissan students and accompanying adults to Buka, which at that time was safer than Kieta. A heavily armed BRA escort accompanied the trucks on the highway north to Buka. Some months later the Nissan people succeeded in finding transport to return to their island.
During this period, various groups of displaced people moved into the mission area at Rigu and nearby Tubiana. With limited resources the priests, Brothers and Sisters fed and cared for these people. “We are managing OK; we get plenty of visitors and a happy, sharing community spirit has developed at the mission,” Bryan wrote on 18 October 1990.

The following excerpts from Bryan's letters describe the situation in September and October 1990:

The economy of the island has collapsed completely. There is no way of transporting or marketing produce. Many businesses have been burned down, others completely ransacked. Most houses in Arawa have been demolished and materials carried away. Only two small trade stores are open in Arawa and none in Kieta. Stocks are limited as there have been no ships since April. Because of the fuel shortage, there are hardly any vehicles on the road now. Sadly, St Mary's High School at Asitavi was ransacked and damaged recently. We drove up with some police to inspect the damage. Because of continuing threats and harassment at Asitavi, the SMSM Sisters left Bougainville some months ago. (4 September 1990)

Gonzaga and I are still OK here, with ample supplies of basic medicine, tinned meat, baked beans and spaghetti. We swap our dwindling supplies of soap and fly spray for kaukau and bananas. Later, we'll have only toilet paper, duplicating paper, chalk and filing cabinets to barter with! We have an abundance of those. I gave our surplus clinic stocks to the hospital last week. (12 October 1990)

As time went on the Brothers' (and everyone's) hopes for an early resolution of the conflict faded and Bryan realised that all their work in salvaging store goods was probably futile, even though it provided constructive activity for the refugees living at Rigu, and was a tangible sign that there really was a better future for Bougainville. Some of Bryan's reflections on this issue follow:

All our efforts in the last months, storing goods and equipment here following looting elsewhere, may prove futile. So much has been spoiled. Our dormitories and classrooms are filled with material that we hoped could be used again with return to normalcy. (20 September 1990)

It may turn out that our place will eventually be destroyed like everywhere else – however, we live in hope. We'll perhaps be one of the last to go. Maybe, as that
stage approaches there may be enough people to stand up against the mindless destruction.  

(12 October 1990)

“Mindless Destruction”, Toniva, near Rigu, 1991

In November Gonzaga Nabbs returned to Australia via Solomon Islands, while Brother Bernard Kangku, from Rokera, joined Bryan Leak at Rigu. Earlier that month there were several visits to Kieta harbour by PNG Defence Force Patrol Boats, which, on one occasion, fired numerous rounds from machine guns towards Kieta and Rigu. In spite of rumours about an impending major attack by the PNGDF, the last weeks of 1990 passed quietly enough.

**Mabiri**

Meanwhile, Brothers Bernard McGrath and Felix Koneana were at Mabiri, Bernard having arrived there in May 1989, and Felix the following August. Bernard recalls those times at Mabiri:

I came to Mabiri to look at the possibility of starting a vocational school. That wasn't possible at the time, because of the Crisis; however, we did manage to run a few short courses in 1989 and 1990. We had a few workers here running the farm, but as the Crisis intensified, they all eventually left. We had cocoa here then, as well as pigs and cattle. We looked after the assets at Mabiri and kept the farm going. Usually, life was fairly peaceful at Mabiri during those days. When the blockade started, things just got worse and worse. We had to ration our fuel, although we were able to get a few drums from the BRA. By the end of 1990 we had run out of most foodstuffs and we were depending on our own food gardens, which were quite adequate. Sometimes we could get a bit of tinned meat from Bryan's supply at Rigu. In 1991 Felix was away for about six weeks checking on his family at home in Buin. About that time Brother Des Howard contacted me and suggested I could help Brother Julian Hakumin, who was about to re-open
the High School at Hutjena on Buka Island. So, about Easter 1991, I left Bougainville, travelled through Solomon Islands to Australia and back to Buka with Julian by the beginning of June.

After Bernard's departure, Brother Felix, with the support of the nearby St Joseph Brothers and other helpers including Felix's own brother Joseph, remained at Mabiri for a further seventeen months. During that time Felix organizing classes for young and old, giving basic lessons and religious instruction to people in the nearby villages. Later Felix spoke with great satisfaction about that period in his life and it was with a lot of sadness that he left Bougainville for Solomon Islands in September 1992.

**1991**

Des Howard (Centre) on arrival at Arawa, Bernard Kangku (L) and Bryan Leak (R)
In February 1991 District Superior, Brother Des Howard, secured the necessary permissions and visited Rigu by travelling on a special Red Cross flight to Bougainville. Although he could stay for only a day, it was a great encouragement to the two Brothers to see Des, who was able to see and experience what life was like on the crisis-torn island.

The year progressed, with the two Brothers helping out at the mission, looking after the sick, caring for refugees, supporting various groups working to restore education and health services, and doing whatever was needed to help people get on with life under difficult circumstances. With virtually no goods coming into Bougainville, everyone, including the Brothers, returned to a more basic lifestyle and a simple diet. In May 1991 representatives from overseas Aid Agencies, organised by Father Jim Carty SM, stayed at the Mission. The Brothers were involved in many of their discussions. On one occasion Bougainville Vice President Joseph Kabui, attending a meeting of this group in the Brothers' house, laughed about sitting in his one of own chairs which Bryan had “salvaged” from the office of the Premier of North Solomons. (Mr Kabui was Premier of Bougainville until the onset of the Crisis). In May 1991 Bryan and Mr Terry Dalila began teaching about twenty students, mainly locals from nearby Pokpok Island. Mathematics and English were the basic lessons taught, and classes operated from 8.30 a.m. till 1.00 p.m. One year after the closure of Rigu they were happy to be back in the classroom. By 28 May the number of students increased to sixty-five, ranging from Grade Seven to Grade Twelve:

School is in full swing – four teachers (Terry Dalila, Sister Elizabeth CSN, Sister Sophie CSN and myself), sixty-five students, in three groups according to their educational background. We have four one-hour periods each day, followed by an hour of grass cutting. Our enrolment increases each day; the students are keen and cooperative, but they have forgotten a lot.

In July Brother John Mauro visited Koromira from Solomon Islands to visit his family, particularly his ageing father. While at home, he visited Bishop Gregory Singkai, who was spending an extended leave in his village. He also spent an enjoyable week with the Brothers in Rigu. In October another visitor from Solomon Islands, Brother Ray Arthur, spent some time with the Brothers.
1992

The year began with the BRA's capture of the ship *M.V. Cosmaris*, which had carried Red Cross supplies from Rabaul. The motivation for this action was complex, but one suggested reason was that ninety tonnes of trade store goods destined for Arawa had been offloaded at Rabaul before the ship sailed. (*Post Courier, 7 February*). The crew was terrified, but was adequately cared for by the BRA and, while held hostage, had the use of a house in Arawa with generator power and a refrigerator. Later the BRA set fire to *MV Cosmaris*, which sank, leaving its burnt-out hull partly visible at low tide. While awaiting transport to Solomon Islands, the crew spent a brief time at Rigu mission. Brother Des Howard, visiting Rigu for six days in February, sent photographs of the scuttled ship to its owner, Marist ex-student Sir Henry Chow.

Meanwhile, efforts to restore some form of education at Rigu and Arawa continued, as Bryan reported in a letter early in the year:

> Classes resumed at St Joseph's Rigu on 3 February, with about twenty-five students undertaking courses in English, Mathematics, Social Science, Religious Instruction, Guidance and Physical Education. Mr Terry Dalila and Sister Elizabeth Rokope teach at Rigu. I teach some classes there and, for three days each week, I help at Arawa High School where there are 160 students at present, taught by five teachers and some volunteer helpers. At Arawa, along with the basic subjects, we have courses in panel beating, nursing and home economics. The students at both schools are cooperating well.

By March 1992 the PNGDF advance was creating greater tensions around Kieta, especially when a group of soldiers landed on nearby Pokpok Island. Soon afterwards, Rigu Mission became a “Care Centre” for Pokpok refugee families. Gradually, many of the coastal communities moved up into the mountains because it was safer there than in the coastal villages, which could easily be fired on by PNGDF Patrol Boats.

**House Arrest of Brother Bryan Leak**

Bryan involved himself fully in the life of ordinary Bougainvilleans and was not afraid to speak out, with prudent caution, against what he saw were blatant injustices. His letters to the Brothers, to various
politicians and statements to the media at the time, demonstrate a desire to be seen as neutral in the conflict, while clearly showing his commitment to supporting the Bougainvillean people in their suffering. In 1992 there was growing unease in the BRA command, due to the increasing presence of PNGDF and to mounting problems among the various Bougainvillean factions. The BRA command tried to control the flow of information out of Central Bougainville and wished to censor any report critical of themselves. In such circumstances, Bryan's prolific correspondence and his access to the mission radio created suspicions which ultimately led to the confiscation of the mission radio, a “house arrest” order which forbade him to leave the mission station, and a requirement that all his correspondence be cleared by the BRA. The tone and content of his correspondence became guarded from then on, as he became aware of his vulnerable situation. However, Bryan continued to write freely and stored his letters until his departure. Plans which had been mooted about Bryan taking a break from Bougainville had to be dropped for the time being.

On the day of Bryan's arrest 18 April 1992, the BRA took him to Marai for questioning. He was not mistreated, but the ordeal was distressing for him, as it was for Bernard and the people at Rigu who were aware of similar arrests and “interviews” from which the suspect never returned. For a week Bryan stayed with the priest at Marai, under the watchful eye of the local BRA, some of whom were his ex-students. Then the BRA commander drove Bryan back to Rigu, much to the relief of Bernard and the Rigu mission staff. Bryan learned from this experience that his situation was becoming increasingly vulnerable and that his continued presence on the island, as one of the handful of remaining expatriates, was becoming less feasible and less necessary. From then on he depended on trusted Bougainvillean for his safety.

During the ensuing months, life continued more or less peacefully at Rigu, which served as a refugee centre and temporary haven for families who had been displaced from their homes or were fearful of the threatened Defence Force offensive. Bryan observed the rules restricting his travel and communication but continued his work at Rigu in much the same way as before. Because of the increased tensions and
uncertainties, the school classes at Rigu were suspended about mid-year of 1991. In August Des Howard suggested that Bryan apply for a BRA clearance to leave Bougainville; plans were in place to ask Bertrand Webster, who knew Bougainville well, to replace him. Francis Ona, who was Bertrand's ex-student, initially gave permission for Bertrand to enter Bougainville, but with the deteriorating situation, Ona reversed that decision and Bertrand never came. Meanwhile Bryan began the negotiations for his own departure.

In October the landing of PNG Defence Forces at Tunuru Mission north of Arawa, marked the next stage of the expected “invasion”. The army's choice of the Catholic Mission was unfortunate, as it created a rumour among non-sympathetic Bougainvilleans that the Church was supporting the “invasion”. BRA forces deserted Arawa and nearby coastal areas, while the residents of Rigu, pressured by local BRA men, abandoned the mission and, with numerous others, sought refuge in the hills above Kiet. Bernard Kangku decided to stay on at Rigu with some of the “friendly” BRAs and other friends. In November Bryan was taken to Marai for further interviews with BRA authorities. There he gained approval to leave Bougainville when an opportunity arose. It was clear to everyone, including Bryan, that if he remained he would create a dangerous situation for himself and his protectors. It was time to go.

A Dramatic Departure

An opportunity came in December when Bryan was given permission to join a group travelling in a five-metre open boat to Solomon Islands. The BRA escort included the high-ranking Ishmael Toroama. Bryan tells the story:

On 15 December 1992, in the company of eleven others, including a sick woman, her ten-year-old son, a nurse and a highly respected BRA escort, I started the journey from just south of Koromira in a five-metre open speedboat. We travelled south, following the coastline for about half an hour and were about to head out to sea when we saw an Iroquois helicopter patrolling the border we hoped to cross. We immediately changed course and headed full speed for the safety of the shore. The helicopter caught up with us, circled and opened fire with M16 machine guns and a grenade launcher. The spray of bullets came within five metres of our boat. Our escort fired a burst at the helicopter with
his M16, resulting in our attackers keeping their distance. Reaching the shore, we scattered into the shelter of the light bush on the foreshore. The helicopter circled for ten minutes, spraying M16 rounds into the trees, and firing about eight grenades toward us. Fortunately, none of us was injured.

The chopper flew off, and, after swamping our boat in the surf on our first attempt to get out to sea, we managed to head north to a nearby BRA camp where we serviced the motor and cleaned the fuel lines. We waited for evening when, under cover of darkness, we crossed the border without incident. However, the day's adventures were not yet over. A storm arose, with lightning and rain, and, in the darkness, we lost direction. Chilled by rain and fear, I told Cecelia, our accompanying nurse, the story of our founder, Marcellin Champagnat's experience of being lost in the snow. I prayed the Memorare a few times with much feeling. We were relieved when a reflection of light on the clouds indicated to our crew the direction of a large sawmill in the far distance. Having established our position, the skipper confidently headed in the right direction, until, soon after, we ran out of fuel. Undeterred, our crew and escort began paddling and set up a makeshift sail. Three hours later, at 2:00 a.m. local time, we beached on Taro Island in Solomon Islands. I felt a great empathy for boat people everywhere. Four hours later we took another boat to Gizo, where Brother Ray Arthur welcomed me. Then followed a flight to Honiara and, some days later, to Australia.

**Bernard Kangku's Story**

Meanwhile, back at Rigu Bernard had problems of his own. Having farewelled Bryan in mid-November, he continued his work caring for the people who remained at the mission. Some days later, the arrival of some unwanted visitors at Rigu began a series of events which forced him to become a refugee himself, hiding in the mountains, out of contact with his Brothers and family for two years:

It was 7.00 p.m. Sunday, 15 November 1992. One of my friends, a local BRA boy came running to me with a warning, “Some BRA boys are here from Kongara; they're coming over to see you. Look out for them, they might bash you up!” So I was waiting for them. When they arrived, they said, “We want the key to look inside your house.” I said, “Sorry, I don't know you. This is my house. I cannot give you the key.” And they bashed me up. Bang! Bang! Bang! And they said, “We are the boss. We own everything. Open the house.” They belted me with their closed fist and kicked me in the butt, using most horrible swear words. One of them pointed his gun at me and forced me to open the door. They searched the whole house and filled up their bags with anything of value. One of them said, “We're coming back here later tonight. You be here.”
Then someone shouted, “Brother, run, his gun is ready to fire. He's going to shoot you!” So I ran behind the Brothers' house where I hid behind a big hibiscus bush. They were searching for me everywhere, so I took off my white shirt so they wouldn't see me. I have my own shirt here [pointing to black skin]. So they couldn't see me. They looked around and called out, “We'll come back tonight and find you.” When they left, the good BRA came and said, “Brother, you come with us now. Sleep with us at Tubiana wharf.” So I stayed with them until about 4.00 a.m., when I said, “Let's go back to Rigu. I want to collect a few things and run away up into the mountains.” I collected some clothing. While it was still dark, they took me to Baba village on the other side of the lagoon and left me there. After about a week it still wasn't safe, so I fled into the mountains. I moved from village to village, eventually, in February 1993, settling with Thomas and Margaret Daveona and their six children in a small hamlet called Kietamo. During my years in exile I helped the people prepare children for first communion and helped out in running liturgies. I had my own garden during those years. Then at the end of 1994, when the ceasefire was declared, I surrendered myself to the PNGDF, and they brought me to Buka. Eventually I got out to Port Moresby, where I met up with the Brothers again.

The End of Rigu High School

As some had predicted, when the caretakers were forced to leave Rigu, the buildings fell victim to the senseless destruction which had already destroyed so much of Bougainville's infrastructure. Little is known of the incident which brought to a permanent end the long history of St Joseph's High School, Rigu. Some time in February 1993, an unknown group of BRA boys came into the mission area and fired the buildings. It is said the fire continued for some days. The jungle quickly encroached on the tangled metal and broken brick. The statue of Champagnat is there still, hidden in the jungle, covered with mould and lichen, his hand shot off, but otherwise intact. There he remains, a silent sentinel to what once was, a reminder of a former time.
Marcellin Champagnat statue in 1962 and 2000

*A land without ruins is a land without memories; a land without memories is a land without history.*

Abram Joseph Ryan
Chapter 27

Moving Back and Moving On
Later Years in Solomon Islands and Bougainville
1981 – 2003

The life of most people is not a straight, unwavering path. The difficulties and setbacks which occur provide opportunities for renewed attempts and different directions. This is the experience of the Marist Brothers in Melanesia and so the final chapter of this story describes new beginnings in old places, adjustment to changing circumstances and moving on “in daring and in hope”. This concluding chapter summarises recent Marist Brothers' history in the places where our story began: Solomon Islands and Bougainville.

Hutjena High School, Bougainville

While Brother Julian Hakumin was stranded in Buka in 1990, the interim authorities on the island wished to re-open the Government High School at Hutjena on Buka Island, which had closed earlier that year as a result of the hostilities. The authorities asked Julian to assist a group of willing teachers to open the school. Among the teachers was former Marist Brother, Kevin Marimias. Julian felt some responsibility for Rigu, where Bryan Leak and Gonzaga Nabbs still hoped for an early return to normalcy. However, District Superior Des Howard suggested that it would be most unwise for Julian, a Buka man, to return to Rigu because of the tensions existing between the Buka people and Central Bougainvilleans. He encouraged Julian to accept the offered position and arranged for Brother Bernard McGrath, who had recently left Mabiri, to join Julian at Hutjena from the beginning of 1991. Julian assumed headmastership of Hutjena High School and, together with Bernard and a small group of staff, began the task of re-creating the school, starting with an enrolment of about two hundred students. School facilities were mostly intact, although the laboratories and a classroom had been
burned during the fighting. At the beginning of 1992 Brother Malcolm Hall joined their small community.

The war had changed both the students and the teachers. It was the Brothers' first experience of educating traumatized young people, a task demanding extraordinary patience and understanding. The Brothers left Hutjena at the end of 1992, Julian for overseas renewal, Malcolm to return to Australia for a time, and Bernard to join Brother Ken McDonald at Bishop Wade High School, Tarlena.

**Bishop Wade High School Tarlena, Bougainville**

Like countless other Bougainvillean women, Bernadette Ropa, a Selau woman from Hantoa village in North Bougainville, experienced the progress of the crisis with great heartache. She was convinced that one way forward was to restore education to the island, bringing the young fighters and refugees “out of the bush” (i.e., out of the fighting zone) and back into school. Hutjena High School re-opened on Buka Island
in 1991, but there were no spaces available for students from mainland Bougainville, where all schools had ceased operation. Supported by her husband, and with encouragement from village leaders, Mrs Ropa gathered some teachers together and opened a High School in 1992. She describes the early days of the school and her decision to invite the Marist Brothers to assist:

I thought of all those young people out there in the bush. I knew deep down they wanted to continue their education. With assistance from many people, we opened a school at Tarlena, using the facilities of St Anne's vocational centre at Tarlena for classrooms and girls' accommodation, while the boys were accommodated three kilometres away at Tsiroge, which had been a vocational centre for boys before the crisis. At Tsiroge the traumatic effects of the war soon became obvious. At first I was really stunned by some of the things the boys did. It was not normal behaviour for Bougainville students. For example, they wanted to fight, hurting or bullying one other. There was vandalism of the buildings and other problems which we had rarely seen in our Bougainvillean schools. Of course, we had to deal with the dreadlocks and the ever-present aggressive manner of the boys. That kind of behaviour was reflecting hurts that were inside. These young men came out from war accustomed to holding guns, but deep down they knew they must continue their education. So they had to make that commitment to leave the fighting behind and just concentrate on school. I felt very much for these young people and I wanted to support them, but I knew I couldn't handle this on my own. The couple of male teachers we had to look after them were not able to cope. I had to look elsewhere. I wanted someone who had a heart for young people, especially the boys, someone who could handle them gently. I asked the people who I knew would help. In 1992 we invited the Marist Brothers to come in. I was on the Rigu staff in 1989. I knew the way the Brothers worked; I knew they would be able to help these young people.

In 1983 Ken McDonald and Bernard McGrath were the first Brothers appointed to Tarlena, just a few months after Brother Bryan Leak's evacuation from Central Bougainville. Ken and Bernard worked hard in assisting Bernadette Ropa and the staff to establish a smoothly functioning school, amid the difficulties caused by the crisis. The presence of the two Brothers with the boys at Tsiroge certainly contributed to a more ordered and peaceful tone among the students, achieved by setting clear expectations and by dealing with students' problems in a compassionate manner. In September 1993 the new District Superior, Brother Ray Arthur, reported in the District Newsletter:
At Tarlena Bernard McGrath and Ken McDonald have done extraordinary work. Even more important than the educational aspects have been their efforts in helping students deal with personal trauma. The Brothers' presence has brought a new sense of life. It has given a realistic hope to these young people that things will be OK for them. The Headmistress, Bernadette Ropa, has worked hard to establish Bishop Wade High School.

Other Brothers joined the community in later years. For two years Brother John Mauro assisted in counselling students; Brother Bernard Kangku helped at Tsiroge for a time during 1995; Brother John Curry joined the teaching staff for one year, and Brother Lawrence McCane for three years. Brothers Julian Hakumin and Malcolm Hall were attached to Tarlena community but lived at Hahela while working at the Catholic Education Office in Buka.

Bernadette Ropa continued as Headmistress of Tarlena until the time of writing (2003), except for a period of three years when she served as Catholic Education Secretary. Supported by the Brothers, Bernadette Ropa has provided sound leadership, firmly based on Marist educational values - she attended a special Champagnat Course at Our Lady of the Hermitage (the Marist Brothers' Mother House) in France in 1999. Brother Martin Connell served as headmaster in 2000 and 2001, a nostalgic return to the school where he worked with Brother Simeon McKenzie forty years earlier. Brothers Guy Yuangi, Simon Serero, Jack Hapilitz, John Malamo and Morris Pakarai worked at Tarlena for varying times between 1999 and 2003.

A significant event on 30 January 1996 was the death of Brother Felix Koneana, the first Bougainvillean Marist Brother to die. Felix had been appointed to a rural training centre on Santo Island, Vanuatu, for 1996 and was in Lololima near Port Vila when he became ill in November 1995. Cancer of the alimentary canal was diagnosed and it was found to be spreading rapidly. Felix died two months later at Father John Keady's house at Chabai on Bougainville, attended by his sisters, Sister Bernadette CSN and Theresa, and his cousin Elizabeth. Ken McDonald, Bernard McGrath and John Curry had cared for Felix at Tsiroge in the preceding weeks. Ken wrote about Felix's last days:
Felix came from Port Moresby to spend the last few weeks of his life with us on Bougainville. Often we would spend time talking, but on days when he was too weak to talk we would just be together. It was evident that God was very much part of Felix's life. His bed was surrounded by images of Jesus and Mary and his rosary was always close at hand. This personal relationship with Jesus and Mary provided Felix with the courage to live his life to the full even at the end. He was happy to die a Marist Brother. He talked about his life as a Brother and his time at Mabiri during the crisis. He also appreciated the renewal time he spent at Manziana in Italy in 1994. These were important times in Felix's life. He put his life in God's hands and trusted that all would be well in the end.

Felix was buried beside Brother Simeon McKenzie at Tsiroge on 31 January 1996.

Bertrand Webster and Felix Koneana sharing memories, 16 Mile, January 1996
Tsiroge Postulancy, Bougainville

In 1999 the Tsiroge Brothers who worked at Bishop Wade High School, along with all the male students, moved to the Tarlena campus after AUSAid built an entirely new school at Tarlena as part of their

Manual work - a feature of the Tsiroge postulancy
Alfred Sagolo, postulant, 1999
Bishop Wade House, Tsiroge
reconstruction assistance for Bougainville. The Marist Brothers gained permission to use the Tsiroge site as a postulancy, under the direction of Brother Majella Fitzpatrick, assisted by Brother John Paul Mauro. The postulancy at Tsiroge began with eleven postulants in 1999, using as a residence Bishop Wade House which was originally built as a Diocesan Centre during the 1960s. The building was in poor condition when the Brothers moved in, having been used by the fighting forces during the crisis and, later, for seven years as the boys' dormitory for Bishop Wade High School. With assistance from many people, including a Rotary group from Australia, Majella completely renovated Bishop Wade House over the following years. The postulancy operated at Tsiroge for three years with a total of fifteen postulants proceeding to the Lomeri Novitiate in Fiji. Majella returned to Australia at the end of 2001. The small number of Bougainville aspirants in 2002 was accommodated at the Wewak postulancy.

**Buronotui Vocational Centre, Buka Island, Bougainville**

Bernard McGrath travelled to Australia for a short time during 1995, returning to Bougainville later that year with the intention of opening a Vocational School at Mabiri as part of the Brothers' plan for ongoing support of Bougainville during the Crisis. The Brothers' friends in Central Bougainville reported that, although Rigu had been destroyed, all buildings at Mabiri were intact. As movement around the island was still restricted, it was not feasible to open Mabiri, so Bernard was available to respond to an invitation from Father Herman Woeste SM to establish a vocational centre at Buronotui, a former catechist school on Buka Island. (Father Thomas Wade - later Bishop Wade - founded the Buronotui Catechist School in 1924 when the school had an opening enrolment of seventy-six catechists.) With assistance from local communities, Bernard McGrath designed and built the vocational school, which was funded largely by overseas grants. The school took its first students in 1997, with an enrolment of approximately thirty. Later, Bernard Kangku joined Bernard at Buronotui. Bernard McGrath introduced the Buronotui students to the small-scale farming methods which had operated successfully in Vanga Point's “model farms” for many years. The Brothers worked at Buronotui for two years, until conditions improved in Central Bougainville and Bernard was able to
resume planning for the Mabiri project. The Buronotui Vocational School was handed over to the Diocese as a fully functioning centre.

St Mary's High School Asitavi, Bougainville

The story of St Mary's Asitavi really begins with the arrival of the Marist Missionary Sisters (SMSM) in Bougainville in 1901. The contribution of the Sisters to the island is enormous: supporting the work of the mission through education and health services, pastoral work in the parishes, and the foundation of the local Sisters' congregation, Sisters of Nazareth. Mention must be made here of the cooperation and friendship between the Marist Missionary Sisters and the Marist Brothers on Bougainville, beginning with the arrival of the Brothers in 1948 and continuing to the present time (2003). Examples include the superb teacher training programmes jointly devised by Sister Catherine (now Emma) Martinuzzi and Brother Cornelius Keating in the 1960s, and the presence of Sister Rabunna Bwakineti on the staff of the Mabiri Education Centre in 2003. From the time of their arrival the Sisters promoted the welfare of Bougainvillean women. While teaching in the parish primary schools, they were concerned about the educational disadvantage suffered by girls whose education was generally not a high priority on Bougainville in earlier times. Discussions with Bishop Wade resulted in the decision to open St Mary's High School for girls at Asitavi in 1956, with Sister Catherine Martinuzzi as the foundation headmistress. Until the school closed in 1990 because of the Crisis, St Mary's Asitavi and St Joseph's Rigu were “sister schools”, cooperating in many activities, social, academic and cultural.

Asitavi re-opened briefly in 1994 as a Catholic Agency school, there being no SMSM Sisters available to join the staff. The school accepted enrolments of both boys and girls, but the ongoing Crisis created great difficulties. Brother Malcolm Hall volunteered for the staff, teaching a full load of Religious Education and Mathematics. Asitavi was in the BRA-controlled area and there were regular visits by armed fighters. Some of these situations became dangerous when rascals entered the school to demand food or clothing. The incident which led to the closure of the school occurred in March 1994. Malcolm describes the tense scene:
Last Monday night I was on duty and I was sitting down with the students at the evening meal when twenty or thirty armed BRA attacked us. It was so sudden we were really caught. They hounded everybody into the mess, brandishing their rifles and knives about, sweeping everything off the tables, forcing the students to lie on the floor and threatening them. They eventually saw me – they couldn't miss the only white – and they stuck a knife at my throat. It was strange but I didn't feel any emotion whatever. One of the BRAs said something to one student in tokples language; the boy immediately covered his face with his hands while the rebel sighted his rifle at the boy's head. I put my hand in front of the rife and said “Nogat, no ken mekim olsem.” [No, you can't do that.] After a bit of hesitation he lowered the rifle…

Later during the same incursion a security guard was killed, two students were injured and the school was looted for food and clothing. The school closed immediately and students were evacuated. Malcolm moved to Hahela with Julian Hakumin, and later worked at Tarlena for a time.

In 1996 Asitavi re-opened with Julian Hakumin as headmaster and Malcolm Hall on the staff. Brothers John Malamo and Bernard Kangku joined the community in 1997. Similar problems occurred, although the school struggled on until May 1998 when disputes with local landowners compounded the already tense situation, and again the school was forced to close, along with the Asitavi Marist community. The Asitavi Grade Ten students were accommodated at Tarlena High school and some Asitavi teachers, including John Malamo, continued teaching them there. Malcolm Hall returned to Australia in 1996 where, in October 1998, he died suddenly of a heart attack. Malcolm had spent many years as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Pakistan.

**Mabiri Education Centre, Bougainville**

The Marist Brothers, at a regional meeting of the Bougainville communities, held at Chabai in 1997, confirmed their intention to return to Central Bougainville as soon as it was possible to do so and discussed the possibility of a combined Vocational Centre and High School opening at Mabiri. When hostilities ended on Bougainville in January 1998, conditions were right for the Brothers' return. During 1998, on the invitation of Peter Kalosoi and other chiefs from Central Bougainville,
Bernard McGrath, accompanied by Lawrence McCane, made two trips to Mabiri to meet with landowners and other stakeholders in the Mabiri project. Meanwhile, Brother Ken McDonald was in Australia that year undertaking a course in trauma counselling, to consolidate his experience of supporting ex-combatant students (and others) at Tarlena and to prepare himself for similar work at Mabiri.

The Mabiri Education Project began in 1999, with Bernard McGrath, John Malamo and Ken McDonald forming the first community. The plan was to give enrolment preference to young men “coming out of the bush”, i.e., ex-fighters, and to students who were not coping in other schools due to crisis-related trauma issues. Given such enrolment criteria, it was possible to attract funding from a range of overseas aid agencies, including New Zealand and Australian Governments and Misereor in Germany. Virtually all pre-crisis buildings were unusable or required renovation, but, gradually, over the following years, the school buildings were constructed. The opening enrolment was about thirty Grade Nine students, followed in 2000 by the first vocational class and a new Grade Nine intake to give a total enrolment of about eighty, increasing to about two hundred by 2003. Enrolment applications far exceeded the school's capacity.

The success of the Mabiri Education Centre was outstanding, primarily because of the excellent care provided by the staff. Ken McDonald had a focal role in providing counseling support, while the whole staff worked hard to establish a good spirit among the young men. By 2003 the proportion of students who were severely affected by the crisis had decreased, as most of that age group had moved out of the school system. At the time of writing, Mabiri Education Centre provides excellent vocational and high school education for young men of Bougainville at a critical time in their lives.

**Avuavu, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands**

Avuavu, on the remote weather coast of Guadalcanal, was known to Marist Brothers from 1938 when the first community visited Father Boudard there in December of that year. (Refer to Guadalcanal map, page 14.) No doubt because of the remarkable period of forty years'
work in the area by that outstanding missionary priest, Avuavu has always been a strongly Catholic area. Three of the first Solomon Islands Brothers came from there: Howard Sukuatu, Chanel Diki and Alphonsus Laumanasa. Brother Henry Uguni, who worked at Avuavu from 1989 to 1991, recalls the background to the decision for the Brothers to go there:

The Brothers wanted to establish an outreach community in Solomon Islands, staffed by local Brothers. Avuavu, being on the weather coast, was relatively remote and there were limited educational opportunities for the children. We wanted to help raise the standard of education in the area and to inject some Marist elements. Importantly, the Avuavu people requested the Brothers to go there.

The first community, consisting of Brothers Tim Ngele, Henry Uguni and Emil Tong, began work at Avuavu in January 1989. The parish priest was Father Augustine Geve, assisted by newly ordained Father Chanel Diki, who was formerly a Marist Brother. (Harold Keke's forces killed Father Geve during the Solomon island tensions in August 2002.) The two priests made the Brothers welcome at Avuavu, providing meals for them for the first few weeks. Tim Ngele, himself an Avuavu man, recalls his time at the school:

I was excited to be going to my home, my parish and my people, but I was always conscious that I didn't want the wantok system to take control of my decisions. [The wantok system involves a custom where support and sometimes favouritism is shown to those who speak the same language] Emil and I taught in the secondary school where we lived on campus, while Henry taught at Hohoilau Primary School, a twenty-minute bike ride away, across the river. We were among our own people and lived in the same simple housing. I liked the simplicity of the life there; we were just the same as everyone else on the staff. Using old fuel drums, we constructed a septic system, so we had our own flush toilet. We did it ourselves and demonstrated how easy it is to do, using one's own initiative. For the first year I had no position of responsibility in the school; I became the deputy in 1990, then principal from 1991 to 1993. During my time as principal I made an all-out effort to make sure the lay teachers were ready to take over the school. My idea was to train them to take on the leadership roles. By the time we left at the end of 1993 they were ready to take up the challenge. The deputy was a very capable person and quite a few of the teachers were Tenaru ex-students and had seen the Brothers at work there.
Henry Uguni reflects on the work at Avuavu:

Our relationship with the people, staff and students was wholesome. Our presence brought great happiness to the people, who felt the needs of their children were being met. We used our limited resources to provide the best possible learning opportunities for the students. We provided education for the poor, the remote and the neglected. The students were innocent, docile, disciplined and keen to learn. People were free to come to our house and felt welcome there, just as the Brothers felt accepted in the homes of the people. People really saw the Brothers witnessing in a simple way to their Marist charism. I felt a vital difference in living my Marist call in a Melanesian setup. I felt I gave all I had to help educate neglected children who have a right to education. I hope that, if manpower allows for it, we will establish more outreach communities in Solomon Islands.

Other Brothers who worked at Avuavu were Joseph Akwasitaloa and Jack Kalisto. In 1993 the Solomon Islands Government offered Tim Ngele a scholarship for further studies in Educational Administration. The District Council could not easily find a replacement for Tim at Avuavu, so the future of the community there was in doubt. Tim,
however, assured the District Council that the staff was ready to resume management of the school without the Brothers' presence. Thus, the Avuavu community closed at the end of 1993.

Tim Ngele gained a Masters in Educational Administration at the University of New England, Australia, and returned to Solomon Islands in 1996, where the Ministry of Education appointed him as Director of School Inspections, coordinating the monitoring of curriculum and teaching standards in schools throughout the country.

**St Joseph's Tenaru, Solomon Islands**

The Brothers at St Joseph's, Tenaru in 1991 were Noel Hickey, Edwin Meresinihinua, Peter Page and newcomers, Gonzaga Nabbs and Faber Turnbull. Joe Neilsen was the new lay headmaster, with Peter Page his deputy.

Faber's seventieth birthday celebration in December turned out to be a memorable occasion, as he records in the Annals:

Gonz decided that a leg of lamb would make an ideal dinner for both my birthday and for Christmas. Faber, whose turn it was to cook, had the roast done to a turn and then put it aside on a high bench while joining the others for the pre-drinks. The kitchen door was open after the cooking and the hot day so that the evening breeze might cool the kitchen a little. The pre-dinner drinks had scarcely been taken when there was an almighty crash in the kitchen. Faber and Gonz raced out to investigate. What a sight met their horrified eyes! The meat plate lay shattered on the floor, but of the roast – not a sign! A stray mongrel had sniffed an irresistible feast and had hit the jackpot of its miserable life. Along with the shattered plate lay the shattered dream of a delicious dinner. There was nothing else to do but to sorrowfully open a tin of fish.

In 1992 the Japanese Ichiki memorial was constructed in the school grounds and unveiled in the presence of Japanese dignitaries. Some 200 Japanese tourists visited the Ichiki memorial in 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

1995 also saw the introduction of Form VI at St Joseph's, an extra year of secondary, which at that time was the pre-requisite for University
education. This change required the introduction of some new courses and the construction of extra classrooms and a new girls' dormitory.

The Golden Jubilee of St Joseph's Tenaru was celebrated in grand style over a weekend in May 1996. Guests of honour were former staff members Brothers Colman Carroll and Vincent Shekleton. Tree plantings, a concert, cultural items, historical presentations and a community feast were held over the weekend. A special jubilee edition of the school magazine *Whispering Aru* was published later that year to mark the occasion. The Jubilee Library project began in 1996. Designed to provide facilities and resources for the Form VI class, the Jubilee Library building progressed slowly because of a shortage of funds; it was completed in 1998.
Ethnic tensions on Guadalcanal

In May 2000 St Joseph's closed because of the tensions on Guadalcanal and it did not re-open until the following year. The story of the tensions on Solomon Islands and their complex background is beyond our scope in this book; however, the following simplified and incomplete facts will provide some understanding of the issues which led to the school's closure.

Problems were brewing in Solomon Islands for many years because of occupation of land on Guadalcanal by people from other Provinces, particularly Malaita. A large number of Malaitan people resided in and around Honiara, and some traditional landowners felt they were not properly compensated for this land use. A rapidly expanding population added to the pressures. These issues came to a head with the formation of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), headed by Harold Keke, and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), Guadalcanal militants, who, in 1998 and 1999, focused on driving out Malaitan settlers from rural Guadalcanal. A major upheaval resulted, with fighting, burning of houses, destruction of property and the displacement of thousands of people. Towards the end of 1999 the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) emerged, recruited from the Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal. During 2000 the MEF raided police armouries, and, on 5 June 2000, seized control of Honiara. In a political coup, it forced the resignation of Prime Minister Ulufa'alu and installed a new Government, consisting mostly of the former opposition. There was a ceasefire agreement in August 2000 and new elections in December 2001, which installed a new Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza. In spite of these developments, many tensions remained, law and order was a major problem and, worst of all, the economy of the country virtually collapsed.

In July 2003 the Australian Government, concerned about the deteriorating situation in Solomon Islands, decided to send an Intervention Taskforce of police and military, their rather ambitious officially-stated intention being to “restore law and order, recover the economy and restore lasting peace.” In the main, the arrival of the taskforce, known as RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon
Islands) was well accepted by Solomon Islanders, and, at the time of writing (2003), conditions in the country appear to be improving.

**Events at Tenaru during the Tensions**

On 4 May 2000 Guadalcanal militants (the IFM) set up a bunker at the entrance to the school. Their commanders assured the staff of their safety, but Malaitan staff members were understandably afraid. The following day the school closed and, with police assistance, students were transported to Honiara.

After the school closed the situation at Tenaru deteriorated, with frequent exchanges of gunfire in the area. Joe Hughes moved to town, where he stayed at Holy Cross and later with the Dominicans. Noel Hickey followed soon after. Severino Lausao, Edwin Meresiniharina and Tim Ngele stayed at Tenaru, either at Laumanasa or St Joseph's. Trips to town became more difficult, as roadblocks were set up at different places and different times by either the MEF or the IFM. Often enough the Brothers heard gunfire nearby, and on one occasion bullet holes were found in the wall of the Brothers' house; these holes are still there at the time of writing. The Annals entry of 5 June 2000 records a near miss for Brother Edwin:

> Edwin was sitting in the main room and, on hearing the gunfire, hurriedly went to the chapel and lay on the floor. When he finally went back to the main room after everything was quiet, there was a bullet hole just where his head would have been, right in the line of fire.

Brother Severino Lausao, who remained at Tenaru, during the height of the tensions in 2000 recalls some experiences from that time:

> It was an anxious time for us, hearing the guns and sometimes bombs of opposing groups by night and day. After Noel and Joe left, we three Solomon Islanders remained. It was interesting because we had one Guadalcanal (Tim), one Makira (Edwin) and one Malaitan (myself). However, I felt support from my two Brothers. At first I suggested to Tim that it might be safer for him in town, but he was concerned for me and suggested I go to town, where there were many Malaitans. I didn't want to leave my two Brothers alone at Tenaru, so we all decided to stay. Among the militants were some ex-students we trusted, which gave us a little bit of peace of mind. All our communications were cut and we
felt isolated. Sometimes the militants came asking for drinking water. I hated seeing them walk into the school with guns, so I challenged them to leave their guns outside. After a month or so Brother Noel visited us on the weekends, bringing our basic needs and after three months I ventured into Honiara. It was like coming out of prison! But the feeling was tense and fearful and no one wanted to talk about the crisis. I was afraid in town, not trusting anyone enough to share my stories.

At times the Brothers were turned back at roadblocks on the highway to town but after the signing of the peace accord in October 2000, it was easier to travel the highway. When the school opened in 2001, life resumed in a somewhat normal fashion, although the phone service to the school had been destroyed and there were frequent power blackouts as well as an increase in stealing and other criminal activity.

“Survivors” at Laumanasa, 2003
Mark Poro, Andrew Ruqegolomo (novice), Tim Ngele, Roger Burke, Henry Uguni

**Death of Brother Edwin Meresinihinua**

Brother Eddie, as most people around Tenaru affectionately knew him, died on 7 August 2001 after a long illness, aged sixty-eight. He was buried the following day beside Brother Alphonsus Laumanasa. The presiding priest, Father Jack Harris CM, of the Holy Name Seminary staff, referred to Edwin's life and mission as a Marist Brother:
Brother Eddie touched the future in his role as a Marist Brother. His dedication and leadership have produced so many leaders from among the students he taught in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

In his comments, District Leader Brother Brendan Neily referred to Edwin's fidelity to Religious life and the difficulties he experienced in living “between two cultures”. Edwin's death was a significant milestone for the Solomon Island Brothers, as they buried their most senior member, the last surviving Brother of the pioneering group of young Solomon Island boys who travelled to Australia in the 1950s.

1938 Revisited

It was a historic moment in January 2000 when two Marist Brothers returned to teach at Marau, where James, John and Ephrem had begun sixty-two years before. It was a new beginning in a new century. Brother Henry Uguni taught in the primary school at Makina mission, while Brother Michael Jones was on the staff at Potau High School, about an hour away by canoe. The Brothers' house was in the mission compound, a short distance below the site of the 1938 house. The Marist Brothers’ return to Marau, still an isolated and educationally deprived area of Solomon Islands, held great promise of developing into an outreach to disadvantaged people and once again establishing a strong Marist Brothers’ presence in that remote part of Guadalcanal.

It was not meant to be. The Marau area was a centre of militant activity because of the large number of Malaitans who had settled at the eastern end of the island. Michael Jones returned to Australia in April 2000 to be with his seriously-ill mother and, soon after, during the mid-year vacation, Henry returned to Malaita for the holidays. At that time the militants looted the mission, the school and the Brothers' house. As a result, the schools closed indefinitely and the Brothers did not return. The first Marist community at Marau was forced to close as a result of the Second World War; by a powerful coincidence the Solomon Islands tensions caused the closure of the second community on the same site. The need remains, as Brother Tim Ngele suggests in his reflections on the Marau closure:
Now, in 2003, people at Marau are still asking if the Brothers can come back. We went there to serve the bush people, the Birau people. That part of Guadalcanal is still way behind in terms of education. There is a need to encourage the bush people to attend school so that we can improve their standard of living. That's why the Bishop wanted us to return to Marau. I really like that place; the people are simple and supportive. They'd like the Brothers to return. Our memories are there. It's a historical place for us.

**Old Places … New Life**

Solomon Islands and Bougainville will always be special places for Marists, for our ancestral stories are there. When the Brothers went to Marau in 2000, a cycle was complete as the Brothers were back in the place where the story began. Yet, far from being a triumphal return, that short-lived opening reminded us of our own fragility and the unfulfilled educational and spiritual needs of so many. Nonetheless, in other places in Solomon Islands and Bougainville, the Marist story continues as a growing number of young Melanesian Brothers take up the challenge of *making Jesus Christ known and loved through education of those most in need.* (Marist Brothers' Constitutions, Article 2)
Epilogue

The District of Melanesia

A new era for Marist Brothers in Melanesia began on 8 December 2003. The urgency of re-structuring the administrative units of the Institute was a call that emerged from the Marist Brothers' General Chapter of 1993. However, within the Pacific, the need for cooperation and resource sharing had long been recognized. The Lomeri Novitiate in Fiji, opened in 1971, was an early response to that need. In 1994 the District Superior of New Caledonia, Brother Georges Pitiot, following up discussions which occurred at the General Chapter, requested greater cooperation and sharing of personnel between the Districts of New Caledonia and PNGSI. Specifically, he asked about the placement of young Vanuatuan Brothers at Vanga Point and the availability of a Melanesian Brother and a bi-lingual retired Brother to work in his District. At a result of this approach, Felix Koneana volunteered for Vanuatu in 1995. Serious discussions about the merging of the two Districts began in 2001. The District leaders, Brendan Neily and Christian Dever, visited each other's District; a plan for merging was devised, and a date set – 8 December 2003. Eleven Brothers from Vanuatu and New Caledonia attended a retreat and assembly later in December, during which the beginning of the new District was celebrated.

When the District of Melanesia was inaugurated in 2003, it spanned four countries (New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and comprised sixty-four professed Brothers, of whom forty-three were Melanesians. The Brothers' ministries included primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education.

The merging of the two Districts offers new beginnings and new hope as increasing numbers of young men choose to follow the way of Marcellin Champagnat, bringing new Marist life to Melanesia. With all our human limitations, the stories of the past and the challenge of the present urge us onward.
Looking Back and Moving On…

Brother Bernard Kangku (centre) with Brother Andre Joseph (Right, New Caledonia), handing on the spirit of the new District of Melanesia to Brothers Alain Worwor (Left, Vanuatu) and John Tukana (Rear), December 2003

This story began with the arrival of the youthful Henry Kangku and his friends in Australia in November 1952. Forty-eight years later, on 7 December 2000, I sat in a haus win at Tsiroge with Brother Bernard (Henry) Kangku, our oldest Bougainvillean Brother. The ocean breeze refreshed us in the cool of the afternoon as Bernard told me the story of his life. It was a good opportunity for both of us to reflect on the past years of the District. Bernard had a script prepared, but the best stories came when he spoke simply from the heart. At the end though, he wanted me to hear the last part he had written. In his strong voice, Bernie read,
Isaiah 26:4 says: *Trust in the Lord forever and he will always protect us.* I say, yes Brothers, the Good Lord and our Good Mother have been extremely good to me and to all of us, over all those years. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

He added, “When I read that part, I feel very emotional.” Tears welled in his eyes, his voice trembled but he went on. “God has blessed me in my long life … all those years … all those years.” There was nothing more to say. We sat together in silence, watching the sun go down over the ocean.
Appendix - Chronology

Marist Brothers
in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea
1845-2003

(Locations in 2003 are indicated with an asterisk beside the date)

1845-1847 Santa Isabel Solomon Islands
1847-1853 Woodlark Island
1848-1849 Rooke Island
1938-1942 Marau
1941-1942 Chabai
*1946- Tenaru
1946 Bulouabu
1948 Torokina
1948-1992 Kieta
1951-1959 Rabaul
1954-1961 Tarlena
1959-1996 Kairiru
1971-1975 Rokera
*1971- Vanga Point
1973-1975 Wewak - Wirui Mission
*1976- Wewak - Windjammer Beach house
1976-1982 Kunjingini
1976-1982 Buin
1976-1979 Koromira
1978-1991 Passam
1979-1985 Goroka
1980-1990 Wabag
1980-1992 Mabiri
1981-2002 Sixteen Mile
1982-1990 Rokera Secondary
1982-1987 Marai
1984 Foundation of District of PNGSI
*1986- Madang
*1988- Laumanasa
1989-1993 Avuavu
1991-1992 Hutjena
1993-1998 Tsiroge – Bishop Wade H.S.
1994 Asitavi
*1999- Tarlena - Bishop Wade H.S.
1996-1999 Bongos
1996-1998 Asitavi
*1999- Mabiri Education Centre
1999-2001 Tsiroge Postulancy
2001-2003 Koromira
*2002- Yangoru
*2003 Foundation of the District of Melanesia
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Melanesian Stories
Marist Brothers in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea
1845-2003

Marist Brothers are a group of committed men whose mission is education, especially of the most needy students. Inspired by their founder's vision which encompassed the entire world, Brothers today reach out to all, wherever they are, with hearts that know no bounds.

This book brings to life the stories of Marist Brothers' educational work in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. From uncertain nineteenth century beginnings, through the turmoil of the Second World War, the Bougainville Crisis and the Solomon Island Ethnic tensions, the story of the coming of age of an authentic Melanesian Marist Brotherhood unfolds in these pages.