Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Lasallian Mission in Papua New Guinea

The preparation for the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Lasallian Mission in Papua New Guinea took almost seven months. The Mass of Thanksgiving had been scheduled for 15 May 2021, but restrictions due to COVID did not allow it. Therefore, the ceremony was postponed.

The purpose of the celebration was to remember and acknowledge the four Brothers who were pioneers in this country in 1946.

Br Antony Samy, Director of Bomana Secondary School, introduced the Superior General, Br Robert Schieler, Br Ricky Laguda, General Councillor for the PARC Region, and Br David Hawke, Visitor of the ANZPPNG District. Each school contributed to animate a part of the liturgy.

Present were the Bishop of the Diocese of Bereina, Reverend Otto Separy, main celebrant, assisted by Fr. Giorgio Licini, PIME (General Secretary of the Conference of Catholic Bishops for Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands). Also present were religious from other Congregations, staff, students, Alumni from different schools.

The Lasallian experience began with a brief mission of five German Brothers to Papua New Guinea in 1914. The venture ended in 1921, due to the First World War.

Later, Monsignor de Boismenu, a former student of the Brothers in France and in charge of the Protectorate of Papua, asked several times to send Brothers to these territories and on 19 January 1946 four very young missionaries began their mission here.

However, the four pioneer Brothers were transferred in 1948 to Yule Island, off the coast, where the Vicariate was located. With a tractor and a bulldozer, they

built a school and roads to have a mission “home”. They taught the basic subjects and trained catechist teachers for the villages (more than 30 in 1955); the young people trained were awarded Queensland teaching certificates in 1956, and the students began secondary education in 1962.

Then in 1958 a boarding school was started in Bereina, 160 km from the capital. Two years earlier, the Brothers returned to start a secondary school in Bomana. Brother Patrick Howard, one of the pioneers, was the Director. In 1969 another secondary school was taken over in Kondiu, in the Highlands, which prospered despite the dangers of inter-tribal violence for the students. The Sector greatly extended its influence when, in 1968, Brother Justin Joyce became the Executive Director.

The Brothers also attracted vocations; in 1970 there were 8 novices in Australia, but the gulf between the cultures – socially and mentally – meant that most left the Institute. Formation was then transferred to Papua. In 1980, there were 6 local student Brothers and 6 novices.

An outstanding success has been the development, especially by Brother Ignatius Kennedy, of the Lasallian Family Network, which now numbers several hundred teachers in remote villages and towns who have enthusiastically embraced the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle.

In 1993, the Lasallian ethos of serving disadvantaged youth was highlighted by the acquisition of the Hohola Youth Development Centre (now La Salle Technical College), to work with young people from male and female settlements in a commercial environment and the establishment of a lay-led secondary school in Boroko, NCD, again to address important needs in Papua New Guinea. Both projects were promoted by Brother Denis Loft, with the support of all the Brothers.