

PAPUA NEW GUINEA PROVINCE

Languages: **English, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu**

Vision Statement

Journeying together with the Church in PNG, giving witness to the Kingdom of God.

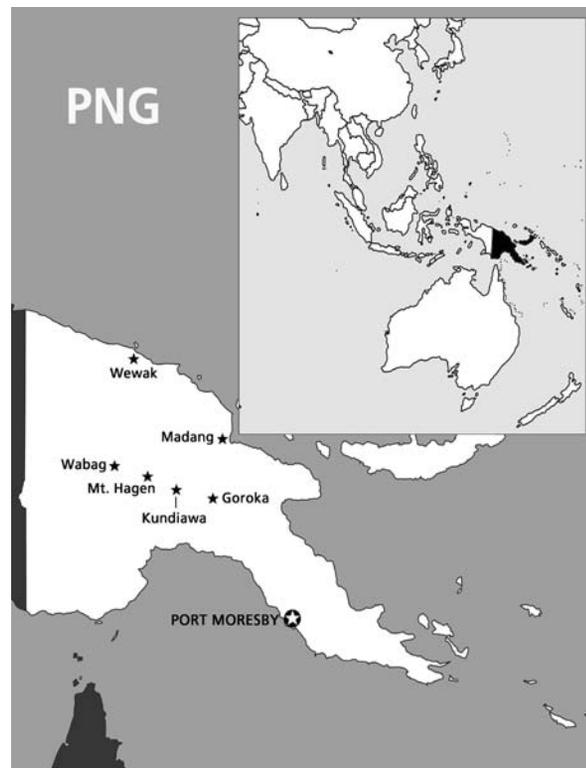
Mission Statement

We, the Divine Word Missionaries commit ourselves to dialogue with:

- *People in remote areas, because they are ignored and forgotten by the country at large.*
- *Youth, because they are the builders of the future, facing many challenges in a confusing time, and searching for purpose and direction for their lives.*
- *Migrant settlers in urban areas, because they are marginalized and unable to share in the prosperity around them.*
- *Members of other Christian communities, because Jesus commanded that we all be one, because our disunity betrays the Gospel and because our divisions can breed conflict, disturbing the harmony of the community.*

1. Societal Setting

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been an independent state since 1975. Its national territory is made up of the main island, which is 80%



of the total, and over 600 smaller islands. The population today is around 8 million, most of whom still live in rural areas and are dependent on subsistence farming for their livelihood. PNG society is structured around many different kinship groupings. The official languages are English, Tok Pisin (Pidgin) and Hiri Motu, but there are over 840 other local languages.

The PNG economy is small in global terms but relatively large in the Pacific context. The economy is supported by substantial deposits of minerals, oil, and gas, plentiful forests and marine

life in bountiful tropical waters – therefore also, a thriving fishing industry. It could be a rapidly developing country but it isn't due to various reasons.

A ten-year civil war (1989-1998) was waged between the people of Bougainville Island and the central government of PNG with an estimated loss of 15,000 lives. It had a devastating effect on PNG socially and economically. A

Our internationality is our strength, but it requires a greater cohesion around a common vision and mission.

referendum for independence for Bougainville is scheduled for 2019. Corruption and mismanagement of funds by government and other agencies is a major problem. The police force is understaffed and undertrained for the job they are asked to do. This often results in unnecessary violence because of a lack of discipline, inadequate forensic evidence for court cases, job frustration, drinking, gambling and corruption. Marijuana production and drug abuse continues to grow. HIV and AIDS are major issues, especially among migrant men and sex workers. TB, including drug resistant strains, is spreading rapidly. Sorcery accusation violence, including torture and killing, is a significant issue in some places, particularly the Highlands.

Hopeful Signs: Recently PNG successfully hosted the Pacific Games, and plans are afoot to hold the prestigious APEC (Asia-Pacific Econo-

mic Cooperation) conference. These establish Papua New Guinea as a leader in the region. There are possible new major developments, with liquefied gas mining and fisheries projects that will hopefully boost the economy. The UNDP Human Development Index is showing a slight improvement. PNG has a relatively free press. Instead of grade 10, grade 12 is now the basic standard for education.

2. Ecclesial Setting

In Papua New Guinea territory, at present SVDs work in the archdioceses of Port Moresby, Mt. Hagen and Madang, and the dioceses of Wewak, Wabag, Kundiawa and Goroka. In many of these places, SVD missionaries were the founding fathers of the Catholic Church.

About 97% of the population is Christian, having at least 200 different Christian Churches and organizations. The mainline Churches are steadily decreasing in terms of their percentage in the population, while the Pentecostal and Seventh Day Adventist Churches are growing rapidly.

The Catholic Church now has four archdioceses and fifteen dioceses. In 2017, the Archbishop of Port Moresby was given the position of Cardinal. In 2016, according to the *Annuario Pontificio* there were 655 priests, of whom 396 are religious and 259 secular priests, 835 female religious and 256 brothers. Most secular priests, women religious, and brothers are Papua New Guineans, but only 7 of the 19 dioceses are led

by Papua New Guinean Bishops. There are over 100 national Papua New Guinean priests, brothers and sisters, either studying or on mission assignments, in various parts of the world.

Catechists have played a significant role in the evangelization work in PNG. Until recent times, when Pidgin became the means of communication in most areas, they served as interpreters for the local language and as teachers. The role of catechist is changing today, but together with other lay ministers, the catechists are often the only agents of evangelization in remote and isolated places without resident priests.

The Catholic Church in PNG has to face many issues at the present time, both pastoral and social issues. In 2014 the Church in PNG and Solomon Islands met to establish a Conference Pastoral Plan to guide the Catholic Church over the next five years. One of our SVD bishops, with a number of other SVDs, played an instrumental role in the preparations, the running, and follow up of the National Assembly of the Catholic Church and of the Conference Plan.

The transition from expatriate missionary activity to local Church leadership is well underway. Of all the mainline Churches, we Catholics were the slowest in the process. Progress has been made, though of the last six bishops appointed none are national Papua New Guineans. In the 6 dioceses which make up the traditional SVD area of work, there are two national Bishops, two SVD Bishops and two expatriate Bishops from other religious congregations.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	34	36.2	40.5	40.3
Education	12	12.8	10.0	5.0
Schools	1	-		
Universities	11	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	6	6.4	6.4	8.3
Administration/ Support	14	14.9	4.0	6.5
Other Apostolates	16	17.1	22.0	29.1
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	10	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	4	4.2	4.0	5.8
Retired/Sick	4	4.2	13.1	5.0
Others	4	4.2	0	0

Parish Apostolate: During the past 115 years of our service in PNG, we began as pioneer missionaries, and then we, SVD priests, developed into the ‘parish priests’ of a developing local Church. Now with the development of local diocesan clergy, our role is changing into one of assisting the local Church in other capacities. At present, we have about 33% of our members active in parishes, but that number is falling rapidly—a sign of the Spirit since the numbers of local diocesan clergy are rising. In the 1980s we still staffed most parishes in the dioceses of our traditional SVD areas. In 2017, we have only one or two SVD community based parishes in each diocese where we work. The SVD have opted in theory to give special attention to remote, isolated areas, and we have also opted for pastoral work in urban areas which challenges us to a different type of missionary presence.

Education Apostolate: Our involvement in **higher education** is a small but very important part of our apostolate in PNG. The Divine Word University has become one of the best and most prestigious universities in our country. We would like to maintain a strong SVD presence in the university, but it is more and more difficult to find qualified confreres for this work. The university now has a lay President. This apostolate in higher education is so important since the Church wishes to form its people on this level also and prepare them for leadership positions in society. The province is making efforts to find confreres who would be willing to go for doctoral studies so that they can assume

leadership positions within such institutions in the province.

Formation of Local Clergy: The SVD also took a leading role in establishing the first major seminary to educate and form local candidates to the priesthood. Today there are four seminaries in PNG: Bomana, Rabaul, Fatima (Mt. Hagen), and Vanimo. We are involved to share our missionary spirit with the future diocesan and religious clergy in their formation.

Lay Formation: The on-going formation of laity and the training of lay ministers are an important part of our evangelizing work in PNG. We have one confrere in charge of the diocesan Pastoral Center. Several confreres are also engaged in retreat work and spiritual direction. In Wewak, Port Moresby and Mt. Hagen we have groups of lay people who see themselves as SVD Friends. They are seeking guidance in Arnold Janssen spirituality and want to be involved in the missionary task of the Church side by side with us.

Social and Cultural Research: Studies of the cultures of the people among whom we work has been an essential part of the missionary work of our Society in PNG. The ecumenical Melanesian Institute was established at Goroka in 1970. It is a challenge for the PNG province to promote interest among younger confreres and to attract new personnel to the institute. This is one area in which our ‘prophetic dialogue’ with local cultures takes shape. Our confreres at the Melanesian Institute are engaged in research

ching contemporary issues such as, sorcery and witchcraft, perceptions of causes of disabilities and HIV/ AIDS, new religious movements, and forms of democracy appropriate for PNG. In 2016, The Melanesian Institute Research Team (MIRT) carried out grassroots consultation on Marriage and Family Life (MFL) for critically engaging pressing social agendas in Papua New Guinea today.

SVD Brothers: At present, there are 16 brothers in Final Vows in the province. Most of our brothers are elderly, but they are continuing bravely with their various apostolates. The Church in our traditional SVD areas owes so much to the hard work and dedication of our brothers. The development of a local SVD brotherhood is slow. Expertise in a variety of trades is still very much needed by the local Church, but our brothers will in the future also have to be involved in areas like management, accountancy, health services, formation, anthropological research, etc.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: Every confrere, no matter what apostolate he is engaged in, is promoting the Word of God as the basis for our Christian life. The tasks of the biblical apostolate are clearly outlined in our PPA (Provincial Plan of Action) paper, and our biblical apostolate coordinator has the responsibility in helping us to implement those tasks. We have a few members in the province with various experiences in the biblical apostolate. Our tasks are made easier be-

cause the Catholic people of PNG have a great enthusiasm and respect for the Bible.

Mission Animation: Even though materially poor, the PNG Church leads the people to embrace in their consciousness and prayer all the children of God all over the world. The parishes where SVD confreres work are centers of mission awareness, especially through meeting with missionaries who are sons of this land. The mission secretary and the superior delegate help to achieve the missionary vision of the PNG Church.

JPIC: Lawlessness, tribal fighting, social unrest, drug abuse, and corruption in public life are all realities of life in PNG today. SVDs, like everyone else in the country, have been touched by these realities in one way or another. How to form SVD communities which remain in touch with these realities in a meaningful way is a challenge for all. Many of our confreres are involved in helping to resolve tribal and domestic conflicts, in other words, in the area of mediation and peace-keeping. Some of our confreres work in awareness about issues associated with witchcraft and sorcery accusations. Our confreres at the Melanesian Institute are involved in doing professional, in-depth research into these areas. Divine Word University also hosts national conferences that address such issues.

Communication: Our confreres write articles to local newspapers, and one was working with Word Publishing Company, which produces Wantok newspaper, the only newspaper in Me-

lanesian Pidgin. They all put every effort to produce Word PNG, the province newsletter. Modern means of communication are bringing about great change to PNG. Most of the places where SVDs work have access to mobile phone and internet via a network of communication towers. We have confreres who work on radio broadcasting and in the production of posters and booklets for the Church communities, and we also have a brother confrere who is involved in the printing apostolate.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Primary and New Evangelization is a focus of the activities of many of our confreres. With so many parishes lacking pastors, we are facing constant requests from bishops for more priests. We would like to be able to provide the means for primary evangelization where it is most needed and yet we are lacking the manpower. The confreres in the parish ministry often end up overworked and frustrated.

Family and Youth are supported by our confreres working in parishes as well as by those in the institutions. In Madang our confreres donated to the shelter for battered women at Alexishafen. While all confreres support the family and youth in their immediate environment, we still need to get involved in the family apostolate in more systematic ways. Youth rallies are constant features in diocesan and parish life and our confreres are often helping to organize those activities.

Education and Research is a solid part of our activities. There is a tradition of our involvement in educating local clergy. Catholic Theological Institute at Bomana relies heavily on SVD lecturers. Divine Word University enjoys a steady SVD presence. During 2018 there will be 5 SVD lecturers and a chaplain. The Melanesian Institute for cultural research is supported by the SVD with two confreres working there full time. The confreres with academic interest and skills are encouraged to go for further studies. At the moment 4 confreres are doing their studies and two just finished.

We also give value to other Congregational Directions in our ministries especially to social justice and poverty eradication, ecumenism, and so forth.

4. Intercultural life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishop	5	5	7
Clerics	72	87	100
Brothers (final vows)	17	32	32
Scholastics	13	9	13
Total	107	133	152

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	53.5	54.5	52.6
Nationalities	22	23	23

Spirituality: Confreres in the province maintain their faith by following traditional SVD spiritual practices of private and communal spiritual exercises. The Bible sharing and faith sharing also play a significant role in strengthening their faith.

Community Life: We have 22 nationalities, only two nationalities which have larger numbers of confreres: Poland with 26 confreres, and Indonesia with 24 confreres. Confreres from smaller nationalities tend to mix very well with confreres from other nationalities. The challenge is for confreres from the larger nationalities not to stay within the comfort zone of their own nationalities, but to step outside and learn how to share with and respect the confreres of other nationalities. It is especially important in use of language to be sensitive to the presence of confreres of other nationalities at all times.

Today, we require a great effort at capacity building with our confreres, i.e., we need to develop new skills, which we can then put at the service of the local Church. We have to set ourselves the goal of serving in dioceses as SVD communities, hoping in that way to set a good example of teamwork with an international make up. Our internationality is our strength, but it requires a greater cohesion around a common vision and mission and a greater sensitivity and mutual respect among ourselves.

Leadership: The confreres are at times reluctant to take up leadership roles because it involves additional workload and travel. Yet through the experience of leadership confreres broaden their horizons and learn to care for their district communities and for the whole province.

Finance: The province is financially self-reliant, thanks to prudent investments of the previous treasurers. Most of the cash needed to run the province is generated in the country. There are more and more people in PNG taking pride in supporting the Church financially, especially in the highlands.

SVD Vocation and Formation: For various reasons, our SVD vocation work in PNG began only in 1977. It was a slow start, and we learned through experience how to develop a formation program suited to Papua New Guineans who feel called to become SVD missionaries. Of the 20 Papua New Guineans in Final Vows, 12 are working as missionaries in other provinces. Because of the steady number of young men joining us, we constantly improve the quality of our formation and the number of trained formators. Vocation work and SVD formation is a high priority for our province. This is the guarantee that our province has a future and will grow, making a special contribution to the evangelization work of the Society throughout the world.