



# The Catholic Reporter

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## First Contact – Remembering the Arrival of the Good News at the Sepik/ PNG

by Sr. Anna Damas, SspS

**HUNDRED years ago, Fr. Franz Kirschbaum, an intrepid young SVD missionary from Germany, set anchor at Kaningara, a village far upstream the mighty Sepik River. That moment marked the first contact of the people there with the outside world and with Christianity. In order to commemorate this event, the parish of Kaningara held a celebration on the 18th and 19th of October 2015.**

A historical drama was certainly the highlight of the program. The parishioners re-enacted the arrival of Fr. Kirschbaum on the mission ship "Stella Maris". Fr. Kirschbaum's first step on the ground of Kaningara was almost the last of his life, had it not been for the courage of his companion, a catechist from the area, who shielded Fr. Kirschbaum with his own body, and for the persuasive "European magic" of mirrors and shotguns.

I found the drama thrilling - not just because the people of Kaningara proved to be good actors who kept their audience spellbound and doubling up with laughter, but also because the actors themselves were a living link to history: each of the young men played his own great-grandfather – those village elders who 100 years ago first met Fr. Kirschbaum. With sympathetic humour they portrayed the ignorance of their ancestors who were scared of the missionary's white skin, were surprised by the taste of salt and were puzzled by the working of a mirror.

How on earth did they do it? I always wondered how the pioneer missionaries in those times went about the first evangelization. What did they say? How did they introduce the Christian faith to people whose language and culture they did not know? The drama provided some answers:

The first missionary was not alone; rather it was teamwork. Fr. Kirschbaum depended heavily on his local catechist who knew language and culture. He did not rely on the power of the Word of God alone; he resorted to some "tricks" so as to highlight the fact that he had something new to say. Their first glance into a mirror was indeed a new experience that both terrified and fascinated the local people. Salt provided a new and pleasant taste, which also insured that the locals kept coming back to the missionary for more of it. And before Fr. Kirschbaum took the liberty to burn shields and spears as a sign of a new era of peace in Christ, he first demonstrated his superior warrior skills by means of a shotgun. (Looking at it from our viewpoint and with our moral standards now, these tricks used then for evangelization may be somewhat questionable, precisely because they are tricks. Watching the drama in Kaningara though, it seemed to me that the local people passed no such judgements.)

It was a long-term educational strategy. Fr. Kirschbaum asked for a teenage boy to be given to him. He would be taken to a mission school downstream at Marienberg and educated there. Edmund (the name he was given at his baptism) returned after some years to Kaningara and became a catalyst for evangelization. Again, it was touching that Edmund was played by one of his descendants.

The drama was unique in the sense that it did not present a description of the first evangelization from a European point of view – of such descriptions there are many. Rather, it re-enacted the first contact from the point of view of the Kaningara people: what they thought, felt and experienced then and now.

As an SSpS and a compatriot of Fr. Kirschbaum (though distant in time) I am most grateful that the Kaningara people remember this

missionary with a thankful heart for the great gift of faith in Christ he had brought them and that they are willing to forgive the cultural ignorance he displayed at times in his efforts to announce the Good News.

*Fr. Franz Kirschbaum SVD  
Born 1882 in Germany  
Mission to PNG in 1907  
Promoted Pidgin as language of evangelism  
Died 1939 in a plane crash*



The Parish church.



The mission ship "Stella Maria."



Fr. Kirschbaum returns to Marienberg with a boy from Kaningara



Edmund returns to his village and teaches local boys "Hail Mary"



The catechist coaxes a village elder into approaching the mission ship

# Four Catholic Religious Receive Queens Award

By Louise Mary Kodor – CBC  
Administrative Associate

Each year, people are recognised for their role and contribution to the development of the country in various fields of work. Apart from the services provided by the government, church workers have and continues to provide service in all sectors of development.

The Investiture ceremony which awards all these hard working individuals took place at the Government house and the awards were presented by His Excellency Hon. Theo Zurenoc, Acting Governor General of Papua New Guinea.

For the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, four religious were invested at the Queens's Birthday Investiture ceremony on November 5th 2015. They are Brother Rudi van Lier SVD, Reverend Father Victor Roche SVD, Sister Relida Gumur OLSH and Sister Anne Hibunon OLSH.

Brother Rudi from Germany who came to PNG in 1966, was invested with the Insignia of a Member of the Civil Division (MBE) for his service to the community of Enga province and the Church. He



L-R: Sr. Relida Gumur OLSH, Br. Rudi van Lier SVD, Fr. Victor Roche SVD  
front: Sr. Anne Hibunon OLSH, who received their medals at the award ceremony.

spent 50 years of his life in PNG serving the church and people of Western Highlands and Port Moresby.

Reverend Father Victor from

India came to PNG as a young priest in 1981 and served here since then starting his mission in the East Sepik province. He also

served in Western Highlands

province and currently in Port Moresby. He was invested with the Insignia of an Officer of the Civil Division (OBE) for his service to the Catholic Church as a Divine Word

missionary priest and General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Along with Fr. Victor, Sr. Relida from East Britain province was also invested with the Insignia of an Officer of the Civil Division (OBE) for her service to education and the Catholic Church as a religious sister in the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. She started her work as a religious sister on January 14th 1978 and served in East New Britain, Milne Bay, National Capital District and 12 years in Rome, Italy.

Sr. Anne Hibunon from the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart became a religious sister on November 24th 1973. She is from Manus province and just like the others, gave her time and service to Central, East New Britain, Manus and National Capital District. She was awarded for her service to the Church and community.

Medal recipients included others from Knight Bachelor, Commander of Civil Division, Companion of the Order, Military and Queens Police medal division.

## Where is the proof of witchcraft? – Lawyer

At the recent forum on sorcery/witchcraft accusation violence sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Mendi, criminal lawyer Miranda Forsyth, who spent eight years teaching criminal law at the University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu, spoke about the importance of presuming someone is innocent until there is proof that they are guilty.

In state courts, there is the idea that a person has to be proven to be guilty through the use of evidence. So you start with the assumption that the person is innocent and then call in proof to make absolutely sure that the person is guilty before they are convicted.

What is the reason for this? It is because it is important to have a system of justice where no-one is afraid that they will be found guilty for a crime they did not do.

So the law says, it is better to let some guilty people go free than to punish someone who is really innocent. This is because the consequences of finding



Criminal lawyer Miranda Forsyth, spoke about the importance of presuming someone is innocent until there is proof that they are guilty.

people guilty of crimes they did not commit are really bad, both for the individual and also for the whole society, because it

means that everyone is afraid that they may be the next person to be accused and found guilty without reason.



A Woman accused of witchcraft and being tortured in the highlands region.

proof. Many wise leaders take extreme care to make sure that the accused person is really guilty before making any orders. Often they decide to dismiss cases because there is not enough proof. This is the sign of very strong leadership. It is particularly important in cases of "sanguma" or witchcraft accusations where the evidence is often unclear and people are often very emotional.

For example, people might see someone walking around at night and think – sanguma. But often there is a reasonable explanation – maybe they need to go to the toilet! This is why even at a community level it is very important to consider what proof is available and to think about other explanations than sanguma for what has happened.

Dr Forsyth expressed these views at the Mendi conference to alert people to how important it is to have real proof that a person is guilty and not just to believe talk and rumour that are not true at all.

In many customary systems in the Pacific and Papua New Guinea as well there are systems of evidence and finding of

# St. Martin De Porres Catholic Parish celebrates the annual feast day



The annual event at Morata St. Martin de Porres Catholic Parish, took place on Sunday 08 November 2015. The parishioners of Morata and 8 mile (Blessed Peter To Rot sub parish) gathered together along with the Bishop of Daru-Kiunga diocese Bishop Gilles Cote SMM, who was the main celebrant on the occasion.

St. Martin de Porres is a Latin American saint who was chosen by Catholics of Morata as their patron saint. During the celebration Bishop Cote encouraged the parishioners to follow the example of the saint and become witness to the community as St. Martin was to his community. He urged the people to give importance to God in their lives

by way of prayer, being humble and being charitable to others.

Since the Montfort Missionaries took over the parish at Morata in 2011, the parish has seen many developments especially the spiritual development of the people. The Parish Priest Fr. Rozario Menezes s.m.m has been instrumental in gathering the people every Sunday for the Eucharistic celebration and encouraging them through his lively and inspiring Homilies, helping people to look at God as someone who is always closer to people, who hears the cry of the poor. Heeding to the message of the Gospel, many who had left the Catholic Church have since returned back to the faith.

The parish is divided into 7 Basic Christian Communities (BCC) and each BCC has its own spiritual programs, which is carried on in their respective BCC's during the week and the community comes together to celebrate the Holy Eucharist every Sunday.

As an expression of togetherness this year during the parish feast each BCC collected money to help the Archdiocese to cover the expenses of its new Chancery Building which will be inaugurated in the first week of December 2015.

As a preparation for the feast day, the parish had Novena prayers (9 days) each day the community gathered together in the evening to pray the Rosary, reflect on the life and works of St. Martin de Por-

res and meditate on the daily Gospel passages. The Novena prayers concluded with a solemn thanks-giving Mass on Saturday November 07, 2015.

The parish has been celebrating the feast of its patron saint since many years and it has become tradition in the parish to mark this day first of all to thank the Lord for the many blessings He continues to shower over His people and also to gather together as a parish community and reflect about our relationship with God and our neighbor.

After the Holy mass the community had a variety of entertainment and a live band from Hanuabada entertained the people while they shared the festive meal.

## People from across the wide expanse of the Diocese of Mendi gathered together at the Cathedral of Mother of the Divine Shepherd for a multi-layered celebration of joy upon joy

The diocese anticipated the launching of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which was announced by Pope Francis and which officially begins on 8 December with the opening of the Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

As part of the local celebration, the Ju-

bilee Gate was blessed and people lined up to enter the cathedral through it to begin the Holy Mass.

The celebration was made even more joyful and meaningful by the launching of the Golden Jubilee Year of the Diocese of Mendi. Many dioceses were established by Rome on

15 November 1966 and the Diocese of Mendi was among them. The theme of the Jubilee of the diocese is from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 52: "How lovely upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings Good News!" "Pilgrimage" Bibles were given to repre-

sentatives of each of the three deaneries of the diocese. They will carry these Bibles to all of the parishes and many of the more than 300 outstations of the diocese to conduct evangelization and faith formation.

Many other activities are planned that will help the faithful

observe and commemorate the two Jubilees.

Finally, during the Holy Mass, the updated Pastoral Plan of the diocese was formally presented and launched. The Pastoral Plan will guide the pastoral planning and ministry of the diocese for the next 5 years.



Bishop Don in Mendi Parish.

Commentary by  
Fr. Victor Roche



## Crime Watchers

In the recent weeks there is an increase of crime rate in Port Moresby and Madang. In the last two days there has been violent protests against crime in Lae. Perhaps it is a similar situation in other cities of PNG too.

Our immediate instinct is to blame the government, "What is the government doing to curb the crime in our cities?" or "Why are our leaders not doing anything about the increase of rascalism in our country?"

Before we blame the government or our leaders, let us reflect for a while on what each one of us is doing about the crime in PNG?

Here are some real incidents of crime in the city and how people 'watched' things happen and did 'nothing'.

A rascal snatched the bilum(bag) of a woman in Gordon's market and walked away. She was shouting for help. No one helped her. Others 'watched' as the criminal walked away with his loot.

Three criminals went into a house in the settlement in Gerehu in the middle of the night. They tied and beat up the family members; raped the young girl and took all the valuables from the family. They shouted for help. Other families near by closed their doors for fear of the

rascals and 'watched' through their windows.

A missionary priest was going to the airport around 9 am. As the driver stopped the car at the traffic light, a rascal opened the back of the car and walked away with his suitcase. He shouted, "I am a missionary, I came to serve your country, please give it back". The rascal ran away with the suitcase. The people 'watched' the things happen right in front of their eyes. No one ran after the rascal to retrieve the suitcase.

On Monday this week, two criminals got into a Public Motor Vehicle (PMV) in Port Moresby around 10 am and robbed of the valuables from all the passengers. As the rascals ran away, other people 'watched' them run away.

The government leaders and ministers 'misuse the funds of the people'. People 'watch' things happen.

We are great 'CRIME WATCHERS' when it happens to others and we do nothing. We cry and worry when it happens to us.

Next time when you see a rascal stealing or doing some harm to another person, do not just 'watch'; shout for help or catch him and give him to the security if you can. DO SOMETHING! Do not just "WATCH". Let me do my 'PART' to stop the crime.

# Blessed Benedict Daswa – father and martyr

**The Church in Southern Africa is rejoicing. On Sunday, September 13, at a colourful Mass in his home town, in the Limpopo province of South Africa, Tshimangadzo Samuel Benedict Daswa was officially declared "Blessed." Murdered in 1990 at the age of 43 for rejecting witchcraft, he is the first South African to be officially recognized by the Church as a martyr for the Faith.**

Why was he martyred? In January 1990, the area of northern South Africa where he lived experienced unusually weather patterns with rain and lightning. Lightning struck a number of houses in the area. The headman of Benedict Daswa's village met with the village leaders and concluded that someone had to be responsible for the unusual weather and that there-

fore, a traditional healer or *glasman* had to be consulted in order to identify the culprit. A financial contribution of five South African rands was required from all the villagers to pay the *glasman's* fee. At the time, Benedict Daswa, a family man with eight children was headmaster of a primary school, a position which in many rural settings in Africa commands great influence and respect. He spoke out against the witch-hunt and refused to pay the fee.

On the evening of February 2, 1990, Benedict Daswa was attacked by a mob of young men. The mob began stoning the car he was driving and injured him. The bleeding Daswa escaped on foot and found a house to hide him, but eventually the owner of the house, fearing for her safety, revealed his

whereabouts to the mob. Having found Daswa, the violent crowd sang and chanted while taunting him, beat him up with clubs, poured boiling water on him, and left him dead. His final words, reportedly, echoed those of Christ on the Cross: "God, into your hands receive my spirit."

Blessed Benedict Daswa realised that witchcraft contradicted his Catholic faith. Pope Benedict, in his letter *Africae Munus*, has said that it is important to distinguish between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements that cause division and ruin families and societies. This is what Blessed Daswa was trying to do. He lived in a spirit of freedom founded on the truth of Jesus Christ. His faith in Christ freed him from the fear of witchcraft and evil spirits and every-

thing related to these dark forces that play into our fears and ignorance.

Pope Benedict XVI addressed these concerns. He noted how anxiety over health, well-being, children, the climate, and protection from evil spirits at times lead people to have recourse to practices of traditional religions that are incompatible with Christian teaching. The problem of "dual affiliation"—to Christianity and to the traditional religions—remains a challenge.

Many see the beatification of Benedict Daswa is an important step, providing an example and role model for Christians in Africa and other parts of the world affected by belief in witchcraft. In a video message, the spokesperson for the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops Conference, Father Smilo

Mngadi, offered a wonderful summary of the significance of the beatification of Benedict Daswa, not just to the Church, but to the whole of South African society and elsewhere in the world: Benedict Daswa gave his life to liberate us from the oppression, from the troubles of witchcraft in our country and in our world. So let us go and celebrate him, but above all, take him as our model of Christian living and say no to witchcraft, and yes to Jesus Christ.

We can rejoice with our brothers and sisters in Sought Africa at the recognition of Blessed Benedict Daswa as a Christian martyr and also here in Papua New Guinea, might pray for his intercession to inspire Christians in PNG to stand united against witchcraft in our country.

## Sorcery torture is a perverse attempt to be a defender

by Bishop Don Lippert of Mendi

Bishop Don Lippert of the Catholic Diocese of Mendi spoke recently at a forum against sorcery accusation violence that the role men torturing women accused of witchcraft is a misguided and perverse attempt to recapture men's role as defenders of the community.

The Bishop said that after the horrific recent events of torture of women accused of *Sanguma* here in Mendi, back in August, he wanted to draw attention to the fact that the torture and killing of innocent human beings is against the law of God, the law of the international community, as well as the laws of PNG and make a plea that this practice must stop.

"We cannot wait for people to change their beliefs about *sanguma*. We must intervene now to stop people from acting on these beliefs in ways that harm other people.

People who do commit these heinous acts (together with the accuser and the *glasman*) must be held accountable before the laws of PNG.

Sorcery-related violence will not stop if people who perpetrate these atrocities can do so with impunity. There needs to be a legal deterrent. Additionally, the intervention of the government can do much to teach the populous at large that this kind of behaviour is intolerable."

"I think we religious people have to admit that – to some extent at least – religion has failed to supplant the ongoing belief in *sanguma*.



Bishop Lippert

Belief in sorcery is utterly incompatible with Biblical religion of any kind. I believe that Christianity has the tools to supplant belief in *Sanguma* and the capacity to do so... and so, the religious sec-

tor must come together to map out a more effective strategy to respond to this great evil.

"Science too has failed – to a certain degree. There are educated people who understand the

fundamentals of medical science, yet still believe in *sanguma*.

"Public torturing women accused of sorcery is not a part of traditional culture. It is a pornographic perversion masquerading

as culture or custom. Where is it coming from? Many ideas have been considered... it may relate to the loss of identity in the traditional role that men exercised in traditional culture – where they were warriors, or at least charged with the defence of their families, ground and pigs...

To see these young men perpetrating these atrocities today – we can only lament the depths to which this proud former image of the traditional PNG man has fallen.

Is this role of torturer a misguided and perverse attempt to recapture their role as defenders of the community?

Bishop Lippert said he hopes and prays that the Forum sponsored by the Diocese of Mendi will join all the relevant sectors of our society and "stand together against sorcery related violence" and put an end to it once and for all.