

Hope in Papua New Guinea

Philip Gibbs SVD

In some parts of the world seminaries are closing, but this is not the case in Papua New Guinea, where several new seminaries have been opened in the last ten years. Divine Word missionaries have their house of formation with the Catholic Theological Institute, Bomana, on the outskirts of the capital city, Port Moresby. Besides the Divine Word Missionaries, the Institute includes students from the twenty-one dioceses of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and from other religious communities.



*Fr. Kamion SVD Dean of
Students at Divine Word
College*



Seminarian with two "watch dogs"

Papua New Guinea is situated on the border between Oceania and Asia, with Australia on one side and Indonesia on the other. The four million people who make up its population speak hundreds of different languages representing as many cultures. In recent times, with a failing economy and political instability, there has been an increase in social unrest, and many people, particularly the many unemployed people in a city like Port Moresby, are finding it very difficult to obtain food and other necessities of life. Crimes often go unpunished because of the inability to enforce the law. As I write, some of the students have come to inform me that the seminary car has been "held up" at gunpoint just two hundred meters from our gate. Quick thinking on the part of the student driving averted a tragedy. This situation is a big challenge for the Church in Papua New Guinea today.

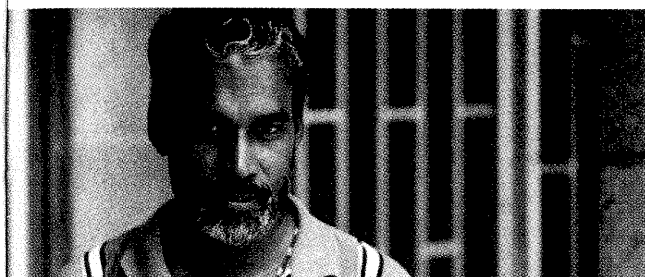


Crowded seminary sleeping quarters

Divine Word Missionaries first came to the north coast of New Guinea over one hundred years ago. There are now 170 Divine Word priests and Brothers working throughout the country. Initially the society followed a policy of promoting vocations to the diocesan priesthood. The first rector of the Regional Diocesan Seminary was Fr. Pat Murphy, SVD, and many of the faculty were Divine Word Missionaries. By the 1960s the diocesan priesthood had been established, and the Society began recruiting its own members. To date there are three national Divine Word priests and one fully professed Brother.

staff, and this continues today.

Fr. Willibrord Kamion from the Congo is the Dean of Seminarians at Divine Word College. I asked him how Papua New Guinea compares with the Congo. He feels that life in the Congo has been influenced by Christian faith over a much longer period than in Papua New Guinea, and that formation in the Congo reflects that long tradition. In the Congo there is a strong inculturation movement that is well advanced. The Congo is also a center for African philosophy and theology. Papua New Guinea still has to discern which traditional and cultural values can be integrated with priestly formation. Fr. Kamion notices that the seminary setting in Papua New Guinea is more open to contact with people in the surrounding settlements. That openness can have its drawbacks. Security was never a problem in the seminary compound in the Congo, but it is a major problem to contend with in Port Moresby.



Fr. Uravil SVD Rector of Divine Word College

Fr. James Uravil from India is rector at Divine Word College. He says that the decentralization of priestly formation has been one of the biggest developments in his ten

years in seminary formation. Several regional seminaries for philosophy and initial theological studies have been set up in different parts of the country. While this move is a sign of growth, it also means that those responsible for staffing the seminaries are in a continual state of crisis management. Staff is short because missionary congregations that used to supply staff now have fewer men to offer, and their decline in numbers is not matched by growth in qualified local clergy. Fr. James notes that Divine Word Missionaries have always had a strong presence on the

As the third staff member, I am from New Zealand and first came to Papua New Guinea as a seminarian some twenty-seven years ago. I teach theology and anthropology, and one of the joys for me is to see the students develop to the stage of final profession and ordination so they can go out to further the mission of the Church.

At present there are fourteen Papua New Guinean students at the Divine Word College residence. The students sleep in bunks in rather crowded quar-



Seminarian doing daily community chores

ters. With the prospect of yet another ten students next year, and the likelihood of still more students in the future, we have begun constructing a new accommodation block.

The students come with rich and varied experience. Joel finished school after Grade 8. Later he entered a

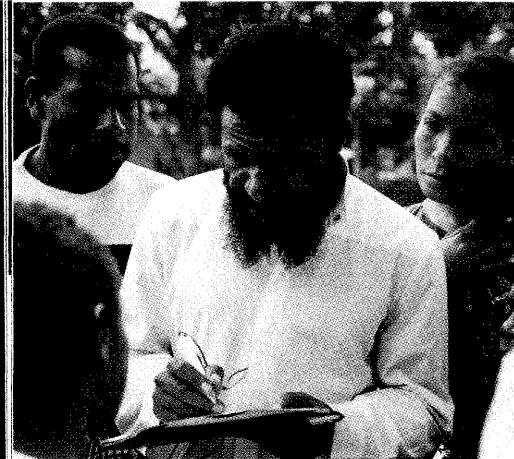
Brother Candidates' program and completed his secondary schooling by correspondence. He first got the idea of being a missionary priest while in Grade 3! Gabriel worked in a bank for seven years before contacting the Society through another seminarian. After finishing school Dennis stayed for five years in his village. His father died, so he remained to care for his mother. He heard about the Divine Word Missionaries in a sermon on Vocations Sunday. Bill comes from the island of Bougainville where until recently there was a civil war raging. He did technical training and worked at a mining project for two years. He first heard of Divine Word Missionaries while doing Grade 12 at a Minor Seminary.

In addition to their academic work, our seminary students all have pastoral placements. Some help with parish programs, others teach religious education in schools, while others visit the hospital or the national prison. Martin has pastoral ministry in the nearby "9-mile" settlement. He describes his experience: "The people coming to the settlements are from

different cultural groups and they have to learn to live together. Some have work; others are unemployed. Many are baptized Catholics, but so many of them come to the city and do not really participate. So, when we go to work in the settlements we try to meet people where they are and to get to know them. Then we try to find ways to bring the Good News into their lives. Gradually some join our groups for faith sharing and liturgy preparation. We plant a seed that will grow in the community. One of the biggest obstacles to our work is the conflict between ethnic groups. We come to a group and notice that a family is not present, and then find there was a fight and the family has moved away. Also the young people are turning to drugs. They know our car and usually we are safe, but last month a group of youths high on drugs stopped me and tried to take the car. I was lucky to get away."

Our students know of many parishes in Papua New Guinea without resident priests, and also know that there is a lot of work to do here. However, they are also willing to go and serve wherever they may be sent once they become Divine Word Missionaries. They understand the international thrust of our community and its work.

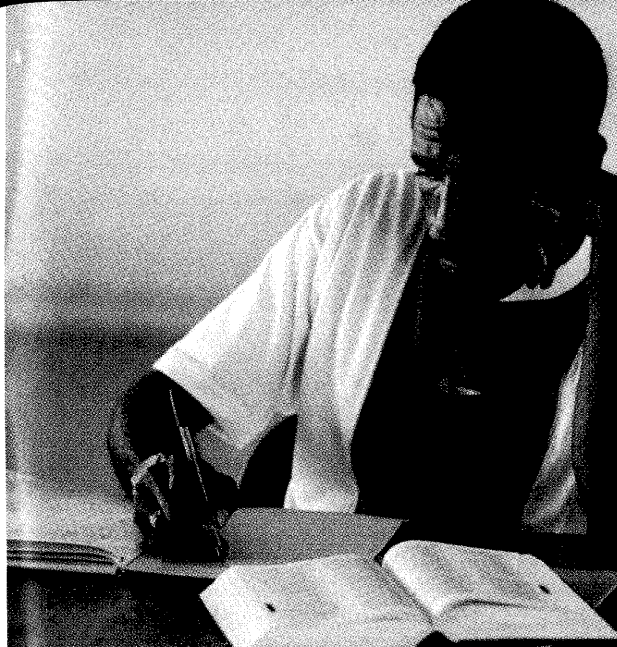
Fr. Paul Kanda, the first SVD priest from Papua New Guinea served for some time in New Zealand, and the second one, Fr. Francis Koimb, is now serving in Ghana. Deacon Stephen Rex Simangi is preparing to take up his mission assignment in Brazil after ordination to the priesthood. Students get a taste of the international character of the Divine Word Missionaries when they go for two years to the novitiate in the Philippines. This international experience can be very important for the development of their vocation.



*Seminarian Martin Goi-Mangi
SVD working with catechumens*



*Archbishop Michael Meier SVD
ordains Fr. Koimb SVD to the
priesthood*



*Seminarian from
Papua New Guinea
preparing for the
next day's theology
class*

Student John Kewa returned from the Philippines last year. He says that the time away from home was shocking at first, but that gradually he grew in independence and self-confidence. Now he understands better the multicultural dimension of the Divine Word Missionaries. He gradually learned to enjoy life in the Philippines and cried when he had to leave. On his return to Papua New Guinea, people noticed how he had changed. John thinks it was not just a change—he had grown.

According to predictions the new seminary building will be fully occupied when it is finished. Donations will pay for most of the \$220,000 needed to complete the job. However, the job of forming new Divine Word Missionaries is never finished; it is always expensive! Life here in Port Moresby is precarious, but living with such energetic and generous young men gives much hope for the future! ♦



*The ordination of
Fr. Koimb SVD to the
priesthood*

MISSION NEED # 3

**Last month a
175
Easter candles
were shipped to
mission churches
for their
Easter celebrations.**

We now need
to restock our supply.

Can you help with a
donation today?

*A donation of \$46.50
will assist the
Mission Center in
supplying the most
needy of mission
chapels and churches
with candles to light the
Easter celebration.*

**An envelope has been enclosed at
the center of this magazine for your
convenience.**