

Papua New Guinea & Bougainville



History

In 1940 Bishop Thomas Wade SM invited the Australian Marist Brothers to open a school on the Island of Bougainville, which at the time was part of the Australian Territory of New Guinea. The first Brothers arrived in August 1941 and went to Chabai on the west coast of the main island where a catechetical boarding school already existed. The timing was tragic. Four months later, the Pacific war started, Bougainville was invaded by the Japanese and became a theatre of war. Brothers Augustine, John and Donatus were arrested, imprisoned, tortured and beheaded sometime around October-November 1942.

Six years later, Brothers Borgia and Simeon arrived on Bougainville, marking the return and continuation of the Champagnat Marist mission. Supported by Bishop Wade and the Marist Fathers, the Brothers moved to Rigu, next to Kieta in central Bougainville, where they established their school, St Joseph's. Over succeeding decades, the school grew and developed a fine reputation. Tragically, during the Bougainville crisis it was totally destroyed. In 1999 the school was relocated and restarted at what had been St Joseph's farm property at Mabiri. It is now a boys' boarding school for over 400 students. In 2024-25 it will take in its first Years 11 and 12 students. The Marist spirit of Rigu is alive and well at Mabiri.

In the 1950's, the Marists involvement, in what by that time was Papua New Guinea, developed gradually. In 1950 three Chinese Brothers, who had fled the communist government, arrived in Rabaul to lead Sacred Heart School

National Identity	Independent State of Papua New Guinea Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB)
Capital	PNG: Port Moresby AROB: Buka
Languages	PNG: English, Hiri Motu, PNG Sign Language, Tok Pisin AROB: Pidgin and English
Population	PNG: 8,935,000 (2020 est) AROB: 300,000 (2019)
Time Zone	PNG: UTC+10, +11 (PNGST) AROB: UTC (UTC+11)
Main Religions	PNG: Christianity, Protestant, Catholic AROB: Catholic (80%)
Arrival of Marists	1941
Number of Marist Brothers	PNG: 3 AROB: 5
Number of Marist Brothers Communities	3
Number of Marist Schools	1

which was comprised mostly of Chinese students. Soon after Australian Brothers arrived to support the mission but the school closed in 1959. In 1954 the Brothers opened a small school at Tarlena, on the north west coast of Bougainville Island. The Melbourne Province agreed to send men to the Sepik and in 1959 they arrived at St Xavier's on Kairiru Island. Melanesians had started to join the Brothers in the 1950's and a local Juniorate was established at Kieta in 1967.

The decades of the 70's, 80's and 90's were years of more rapid development in the footprint of Marist Ministry. On Bougainville, communities opened at Koromira, Buin and Marai. In PNG proper, Brothers went to Wewak, Kunjingini, Passam, Bongos and Yangoru in the East Sepik. They also opened communities in Goroka, Port Moresby and Madang. The Marists also ventured beyond their strongholds to the Enga and Western Provinces in this period.

The Marist mission on Bougainville came to a standstill during the Crisis of 1988 to 1998. However when peace was restored, the Marist Brothers were invited to help re-open the schools on what was then the Autonomous District of Bougainville (AROB). Hutjena High School (on Buka Island), Bishop Wade High School (Tarlena), St Mary's (Asitavi), St Gregory's Vocational School (Koromira) were all re-developed with Brothers either Principals or members of staff.

While the works in PNG were initially started and staffed by either the Provinces of Melbourne or Sydney, the Marist mission there gained a degree of autonomy when the District of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands was established in 1984. Its leaders were Jeff Crowe, Des Howard, Ray Arthur, Brendan Neily. This was reorganised into the District of Melanesia in 2003 when Vanuatu and New Caledonia were added to the administrative unit. Brendan Neily, Ken McDonald and Jean-Marie Batick were its leaders. In July 2020, the District merged into the Province of Australia. At various times there have been houses of formation in PNG, notably at Wewak, Goroka, Tsiroge and Madang.

Ministry Today

Over the last twenty years, as the Expat Australians left and the number of local Brothers declined, there has been a gradual withdrawal from places of ministry. Currently St Joseph's Mabiri on Bougainville is the only Marist led and governed School in PNG.

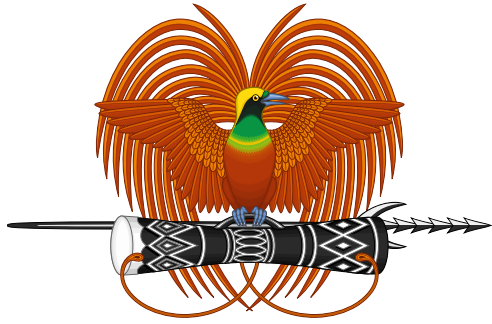
Recently some Brothers have worked at the Lasallian Vocational school in Port Moresby and other Brothers have been members of the staff at Divine Word University Madang; one is still there.

Marist Family

There is no formal arrangement that gives the broader Marist family an identity in PNG. However, there are many former Brothers, ex-students and former staff members who have maintained close connections with the Champagnat Marists. There is an informal network on Bougainville.

Communities

There are currently three Communities in PNG. One at Mabiri, Bougainville; one at Korobosea, Port Moresby, which was the former District Administration Centre; and one on the site of Divine Word University, Madang.



Papua New Guinea Flag and Coat of Arms



Bougainville Flag and Coat of Arms