

Our NCC activities reach grassroots level through national radio programmes (morning and evening devotions), national event celebrations, and chaplaincy in the hospitals, schools, jails etc.

Since our political independence we have experienced political unrest and civil tension:

- a) 1979-80, churches/political parties supporting independence, versus churches/political parties opposing independence.
- b) 1988 – May (November) Political and civil unrest.
- c) 1998 – Misuse of National Provident Fund by politicians which led to civil unrest.

During such unrest, the politicians seem to go into hiding and chiefs and church leaders come forward to reconcile and restore peace and unity into the community. One such incident happened on Good Friday, and perhaps Vanuatu made world history as the only nation who voted out its Prime Minister on Good Friday!

My own experience of ecumenism began with my involvement in the peacekeeping force in Bougainville. I was secretary for NCC during late 1990s and early 2000 and I had previously sent four of my colleagues as Chaplains to the peace monitoring group in Bougainville. I thought it was then my turn to go, so I went as army chaplain for six months. I experienced the power of prayer in ecumenism. I was working with an Australian chaplain and I helped the church leaders in those different districts to come together. Even church leaders were threatened and abused because of their support to break away from PNG. During the end of 1998 and mid 1999, one of my main jobs was to unite the church leaders and the people at grass roots.

I would like to share an incident that happened in South Bougainville. Before I went in, a commander of the BRA, Thomas Tari, shot one of his colleagues, and the four contingents had not talked to this man since then. It was almost time for us to leave the island and two men asked our commander if the chaplain could contact this man. I told them that to bring unity and peace I have to go on my own to see Tari. The Commander said no at first, but finally accepted my decision to go alone. My colleagues drove me closer to Thomas Tari's home and I asked them to return in two hours. Tari recognized me as a chaplain by the crosses on my collar and I had a good time talking to him. I told him I represented the churches of the Pacific,

and we have prayed for Bougainville for eight years. "Peace was coming in other areas, but South Bougainville is behind. Will you surrender, and reconcile?" It was a hard time, but I experienced the power of prayer. He started to cry and it was a turning point in his life during the crisis. That was a highlight of ecumenism for me.

God is with us in our circumstances.

New Order in the Islands

Rev. Dr. Kambati. K. Uriam

While missionaries and local Church leaders were enjoying their petit kingdoms in the Pacific, two forces were also beginning to establish themselves in the Islands:

- i. The new economic order; and
- ii. The new power structure.

The two phenomena, while they seem to appear independent of the missions and the churches, had more connections with the missions and churches than any other group or organization. In fact, it was the Churches with their new Christian environment that contributed immensely to their emergence in the first place.

But how? How do missions and churches bring about or contribute to this new economic order and the new power structures in the Islands? We need only to go back to the end of the 19th century to get the picture in perspective.

The end of the 19th century saw many people of different dialects and islands, even territories, because of their Christian faith, come together as a unified group or entity. This was the beginning of the formation of national consciousness and nation states in the Islands. These new unified entities were able to stick together because of the

new economic order and the new power structures that were already part of the island scene, both of which thrived on the new ethics, laws and constitutions drafted (or assisted in drafting), by the missions and churches. But while the new economic order and power structure thrived on the new Christian environment, we need to be reminded that several missions and churches were, with early traders, among the pioneers of commercial activities; and holders of positions of power and governance, together with local as well as foreign powers, in the Islands.

And so, missions and churches, whether they liked it or not, contributed to the formation of nation states, the new economic order and the new power structures that maintain pockets of different territorial or linguistic communities who adhered to an identity and destiny and want to fulfil or realise that 'experiment.'

There would be a myriad of reasons why people decided to accept Christianity, but obviously it is the benefits from the new religion that was the main attraction:

- freedom from spiritual fears, cultural taboos and obligations;
- access to white man's wealth and power; hence:
- advantage over non-Christians;
- peace, order, and stability;
- everlasting life.

There were more benefits for one to become a member of the Christian community than to remain outside it. In many Islands, as early as the second half of the 19th century, the community was the Church, with its own rules and means of cohesion. To be outside the Church meant being outside the community, making oneself an outlaw and a public enemy.

This new Christian environment that began to supersede the old traditional order in the Islands from the latter half of the 19th century, took over and controlled the Island scene even as early as the 1920s (although the interior and highlands of PNG were yet to be visited by Christian missionaries). Before the end of the 1950s, with the new resurgence of missionary activities in the islands, the missionaries had come back in larger numbers than ever before, and the Island environment was already overwhelmingly Christian.

By the beginning of the 1960s, people's lives everywhere in the Islands were revolving around new patterns of exchange, and many people had come to appreciate or accept, in general, the new power structures which were redefining territorial boundaries, and putting in place new patterns of leadership and governance in the new Pacific (Christian) environment.

There were disadvantages of living within the new economic order and under the new power structures, such as,

- A growing materialistic and individualistic culture;
- Negligence of cultural or traditional obligations; hence, the collapse of many traditional institutions and customs;
- Dislocation of communities because of migrations;
- Redefining of territorial boundaries for administrative convenience;
- Racial and ethnic conflicts, etc.

There were also many advantages, including:

- Guarantee of peace, order, and stability because of the new laws and the efficient forces of cohesion, and because of the new ethics, based on the decalogue and the teachings of Jesus;
- Access to foreign goods and materials that make life more comfortable and bearable in the islands in some cases; and
- Wider horizons through education, communication, and technologies.

By the beginning of the 1960s, the missions and churches, finding themselves in an environment that agreed with them, yet at the same time disagreeing, if not rejecting their message, decided to address the situation. At Malua in 1961, many Church leaders felt threatened by the new social environment and many rejected it, never realising that they contributed to its genesis—it is their child as well. It took several prophets like Alfred Alfurai and Bernard Thorogood to convince the missions and churches that the child they wanted to disown, the new socio-economic and political environment, was their child as well: they cannot and should not reject it. If the child was rebellious and would not conform or come to the parents—then like God in Christ, the parent has to go and seek the lost rebellious child.

Alfurai, Thorogood, and several others at the Malua Conference gave new meaning to and proposed a new theological basis for mission, one where the churches and missions saw the people not as a mission

field but as partners in the creation of a better world. Thus, the churches should not direct and engineer society but be co-workers with the people. Laity was given a new meaning and recognition.

Because of this new missiological trend, the need for an advanced theological centre to map out a theological path that will take seriously this new emphasis was raised. It would be a theological centre for all the missions and churches present at the meeting, one that provides not only the relevant, but one that creates also and delivers seminal ideas—an advanced ecumenical theological centre of learning and research.

In order to realise the two - the ecumenical theological centre and the fulfilment of the new missiological direction - unity of the Churches was seen as the way forward. Unless they were united, there was a possibility they would devour one another, and no one will believe their message. There was no better way to witness to the world than by being united.

Except for several churches in Tahiti, Tonga, and Samoa, many of the churches became independent after the 1960s. When they did, many were thankful for the new direction and their unity as it helped them to face the radical changes of the 60s and 70s when Island nations were struggling to find their place in a rapidly changing world: when one major form of colonialism came to an end only to be replaced by new forms stepping in to take its place.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us continue to tell our stories, the raw materials of the story we want to tell others and to pass on to the next generation.

Kam raba.

BENDER ENICAR



Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Kaselehlia from Pohnpei United Church of Christ.

The words 'ecumenical' and 'ecumenism' are new words that have been recently added to our church vocabulary. The Christian missionaries who brought the gospel to Pohnpei in the mid-1800s did not bring these words among those they introduced. The Christian missionaries' activities prioritized more on building churches, schools and on evangelizing of the natives. These missionaries did have a basic ecumenical perspective in that they first pacified the minds of their adherents so they could live peacefully with each other. I therefore, believe the Christian missionaries began this ecumenical journey by preaching and showing God's love and care for humanity.

The missionary era has now come to an end and the task of promoting and fostering Christian unity on Pohnpei and throughout the world is now passed on to the present church leadership. I will not deny the fact that there is still a negative impact arising from the influx of different churches and religions to our island. Families, friends and relatives have developed hard feelings against each other because of different doctrines, theologies and religious practices which are rooted in the minds of Pohnpeians. In spite of numerous opposition and obstacles along the way, Pohnpei church leaders realize the need to work together for common advantages. Below are some of the achievements and accomplishments that may pave the way for this journey:

- a) The Protestant and Catholic church leaders initially organized a team of Bible translators. These Bible translators managed to complete their assigned task within five years. A Bible launching ceremony and celebration followed in which both denominations participated.
- b) The Protestant and Catholic church leaders came together to