

***Our Catholic Laity: Holy and FORMED for Mission
A Pastoral Letter for the Year of the Laity Part II, 2020***

Dear Catholic lay people of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands,

We Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PNGSI) recently issued a Pastoral Letter entitled “A Call to Holiness in Today’s World.” We affirmed the great contributions of the laity in the mission of evangelization and transformation of the world, and in the daily living of the Catholic faith. We say again that you lay people of PNGSI have a vital role in bringing the gospel to the world. Our church is alive in Christ engaged in every aspect of mission to the “market place” of political, economic, and social life.

The call to holiness requires that you, our lay men and women, truly encounter Jesus Christ and have continued and careful spiritual and intellectual formation to enlighten your hearts and minds. In previous times, it was thought that weekly homilies and devotions were enough “food for the soul.” But thanks be to God and to the movement of the Holy Spirit, you are now hungry for more spiritual food. You are ready to move from “milk” to “solid food” (1 Cor. 3:2). There is a great need for an educated and articulate laity who are ready to give an accounting for “the hope that is in them” (1 Peter 3:15b). You are ready for the discipline of a disciple, for listening and learning from Jesus. The Scriptures, especially the Wisdom books, encourage everyone to pursue wisdom and the true knowledge of God. All genuine knowledge is knowledge of the truth, and therefore of the mystery of God (Rom 11:33). Knowledge of God is necessary for doing the justice of God (Prov. 2:6-15). You can draw also on other Scriptures, our PNGSI Catechism, and the reflections of our Holy Father Pope Francis, especially in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, for example his reflection on the Beatitudes (Chapter 3).

True knowledge leads to wonder, gratitude, and a desire to know and do more. We all need to promote more education and spiritual updating of the laity through youth and adult faith formation on every level including parish, diocese and Conference levels. There are many good examples of effective lay people to imitate: Blessed Peter to Rot, our pioneer catechists, and so many lay saints, single and married. There is really no limit to the evangelical love that you as a lay person can bring to your family, workplace and social life (Gal 5:22).

What can we all do together for the education and formation of lay people? Our PNGSI dioceses have many resource people who can be tapped to offer courses, workshops and ongoing programs for God’s people.

- Christian Family Life remains the key to an effective lay apostolate and must be nurtured in every way possible. Christian families, as the “domestic church”, witness to the new life in Christ and enable their members to go out to evangelize and transform the world. Family prayer based on the Word of God can be especially supportive of the family members’ engagement in the mission of their ordinary life. Clergy and laity can accompany those in irregular situations. Parents can mold and accompany your children as their first catechists. It is very important that your children find a safe place where they are nurtured in their faith, and loved, cared for and protected.

- Associations, movements, and devotional groups can strengthen the dimension of formation by arranging opportunities for your members to grow in faith, especially knowledge of the special charism of the group to which you belong. Our Blessed Mother Mary has blessed our Catholic women and our PNGSI Church. Devotion to St. Joseph as physical and spiritual protector and provider will also encourage and animate our men's groups, which are often the weakest ministry in the Church.
- Lay men and women involved in professional apostolates such as education, health, communication, law and justice, the disciplined forces, care for the poor, and public service, can acquire the necessary skills to go beyond professionalism so as to bring the gospel into your field of expertise.
- Teachers in our Catholic schools and teachers of religious instruction in other schools and for the unschooled, must mobilize to lay solid foundations for growth in the faith, including literacy. Tertiary institutions should consider having a missioning ceremony for their graduates so that they might fully realize that their skills are at the service of the mission of the church.
- The lay apostolate is far more than liturgical and pastoral tasks. However, those of you involved in these ministries such as catechists, communion, music, and other liturgical ministers, youth, men and women's leaders can also improve your knowledge and skills to carry out your ministries effectively. Liturgy and prayer led by lay people is a normal part of the life of the church. Appropriate formation of these ministries is a special task of the parish priest.
- In places with Internet access, there are some wonderful and informative sites that you can use for education and formation if you have access, (e.g. Vaticannews.va, Catholicnewsagency.com, and Catholicsanswers.com). These free internet sites have reliable and accurate information on the teachings of the Church. The Vaticannews.va site also has the daily readings, lives of the saints and even a summary of the Pope's daily homily. The Internet and social media are valuable resources for your growth but you need to be cautious since they also promote pornography, bullying, cybercrime, scams, fake news, data theft, and other negative things. Those of you who are able can help us instruct our youth and others on good and proper Internet and social media use and to offer caution about its negative factors (see signis.net for help).
- Priests can offer spiritual formation and education when they visit communities for Mass, sharing the knowledge they learned at the seminary. This is a proper task of clergy, to empower the laity (PNGSI Catechism 311-315). Seminarians and clergy also need formation in servant leadership for cooperation with the laity in order to avoid clericalism, the temptation to claim a power and authority unrelated to their proper role. A key part of priestly ministry is to offer catechesis to the laity, to support and be present at lay led activities, and to learn from them.
- Most of our Major Seminaries are now open to lay students. A few of you have taken advantage of this offer but perhaps the seminaries could consider how to organize

themselves so that more laity could take religious studies, philosophy, or theology certificate, diploma, and degree programs. Allowing young lay people into these programs has also promoted and fostered vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Your formation is for your own personal knowledge and for the betterment of your families, communities, and the whole of the church and society. This formation must lead you to be more involved in the *mission* of the Church which is to teach, preach, evangelize, and transform our communities and the whole world (Mt. 28:16-20). Thus, formation is for action, not for show (Rom 15:14). Preparation for Confirmation is a special time where candidates could be equipped with appropriate skills and motivation for mission.

Prayer is a vital part of your Christian life. Jesus began all ministry and continued it with prayer. Prayer for the Laity can be food that makes formation and mission possible. Commitment to personal and family prayer, and faithfulness to community and liturgical prayer, supports mission. You and your communities can be united in prayer with this common Prayer for the Laity which could be said at Mass or community prayer:

*God our Loving Father, Jesus sent His Apostles to
'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation'.
As we focus on the laity and their call to holiness in the world, we renew our
baptismal promises and give ourselves to you our loving Father.
We will be Christ - prophet, priest and king - in the world.
May Mary our loving Mother, the first disciple of your Son Jesus, help us to be
faithful in our mission.
We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord, AMEN.*

May God bless you and our church and all our work together as laity, priests, bishops and consecrated people in the mission of the church, spreading the Gospel for our own good and for God's glory.



+ Rochus Tatamai
President CBC PNGSI

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