



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE Of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

P.O. Box 398, Waigani, NCD, Papua New Guinea \* Phone: (675) 325 9577 \* Fax: (675) 323 2551 \*

25<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## OUR CATHOLIC LAITY: HOLY, FORMED AND SENT FOR SERVICE

### A Pastoral Letter for the Third Year of the Laity, 2021

### From the Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands

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

We, the Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands (PNGSI) greet you in the name of Jesus Christ!

We write this letter to you, the third in the three years dedicated to you, the Laity. The first Pastoral letter was written in 2019 with the theme: **“A Call to Holiness in Today’s World”** and the second one was in 2020 with the theme of: **“Our Catholic Laity: Holy and formed for mission”**. In this letter we want to strengthen your role in the church with a renewed calling for partnership in the mission of the church: **“Our Catholic Laity: Holy, formed and sent for service”**

**This Pastoral letter focusses on main areas; holiness, formation and sending and service or mission**

1. **“Holy”:** God wants all of us to be holy. Holiness is not something for only some people in the church. It is a life of grace that all of us can live every day of our life. As St. Paul writes to Timothy, “Jesus saved us and called us to a life of holiness. This did not depend on our merits, but on his generosity and his own initiative” (2 Tim 1:9). This holiness is the personal relationship with Jesus who died and rose again. If we have experienced the power of his resurrection, as St. Paul tells us, “we are led by the Holy Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Holiness can be achieved through:

1.1 **Personal Prayer:** We highly recommend you to be committed to daily personal prayer for at least fifteen minutes each day. Personal prayer follows from a personal encounter with Jesus. Meet Him daily in His Word. You can reflect for example on the daily readings on what God wants you to follow.

1. 2 **Family Prayer:** In today’s world of TV, Internet, and cell phones the family is caught at the crossroads of secularism and spirituality. The family that prays together, stays together. We suggest to you a short format of family prayer which can be followed by all Catholic families for your spiritual nourishment:

- I. Pray the Rosary
- II. Bible Reading of the day
- III. Father or Mother or other adult of the household shares a word of encouragement to the family following the Bible reading.
- IV. Spontaneous prayers of intercession by the family

1.3 **Community prayer:** Coming together in the Basic Christian Communities is a great source of strength to grow in holiness as they did in the early Christian Community. “They devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). You can come together for weekly Bible sharing using for example, the seven-step method. This communal prayer is also a time of evangelization.

1. **‘Formed’:** Jesus formed his disciples for three years spent with Him before He sent them out into the world (Mk 6: 7-13). We Catholic Christians need constant discipline and formation spiritually, socially, intellectually, and psychologically. We need integral human development. In our previous pastoral letter of 2019, we had suggested the different possibilities of education and formation of lay people in PNGSI.

2.1 **Children and Youth:** We the Bishops of PNGSI see the need of nurturing our children in the Catholic faith. The children are the present and the future of the Church and society. We need to instill in them spiritual and social values. We call upon the families to make every effort to send their children to Sunday School in the parishes and wherever possible, to enroll them in our Catholic Schools. Catholic children should join the Missionary (Holy) Childhood for on-going formation.

In the same way, the Catholic students and Catholic youth in our parishes need to have an on-going formation in their Catholic faith. We seek the partnership of parish priests and lay leaders to help in the Catechesis of the young people.

2.2 **Lay Theologians:** For most Catholics, the input for spiritual formation is the Sunday Homily only. You, the lay people are now hungry for more spiritual food. You are ready to move from ‘milk’ to ‘solid food’ (1 Cor 3:2). We encourage more lay people to be educated in Theology and Spirituality to give on-going formation in small Christian Communities and seminaries.

3. **‘Sent’**: In the New Testament, the words ‘send’ or ‘sent’ occur 129 times. The 12 Apostles were sent forth by Jesus, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). The mission of proclaiming the Gospel is not the privilege of the Bishops, Priests, Religious and Catechists only. It is the duty of every baptized Catholic. Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 Dec 1975) emphasized, “The Church exists in order to evangelize”.

3.1 **‘Sent for service’**: The Catholic Church excels in giving service to the people in both the countries in the field of Education, health, and charitable institutions. The Catholic Lay people are part of this service of building the Christian community in charity especially to the poor and the marginalized (Lk 4:18).

3.2 **‘Sent to evangelize’**: There is so much that Catholic lay people can do to bring the Gospel into the world. Thanks be to God we now have active Catholic lay Associations, movements and devotional groups in PNGSI such as: Legion of Mary, Divine Mercy, Rosary groups, Charismatic Renewal groups, Catholic women, Catholic men, Catholic Professionals, Antioch Youth, Catholic Youth and many more.

Pope Francis says about the Laity: “they are a source of enrichment for the church, raised up for the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel- 24 Nov 2013). But he calls for more active involvement of the lay people thus: “Lay people are, put simply, most of the people of God. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis, and the celebration of the faith. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political, and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 102).

3.3 **‘New Evangelization’**: Pope Saint John Paul II called for a New Evangelization in “**ardor, methods and expression**” (9 March 1983, Pope John Paul II’s Address to the Bishops of Latin America (CELAM), Port au-Prince, Haiti). The Church is called for a New Evangelization or Re-Evangelization in PNGSI. You, the lay people can be a source of light within the communities in which you live. Catholics can make a difference. We challenge the Catholic Lay people to take the lead against polygamy, sorcery accusation-related violence, witchcraft, corruption, tribal fights, domestic violence

and wantokism in the village communities, private and government sectors. New Evangelization is a renewed call for harmony of faith and life. We can make a difference!

Pope Francis' words may be very suitable for PNGSI: "it is imperative to evangelize the cultures in order to enculturate the Gospel, this means encouraging, fostering and reinforcing a richness which already exists... We see deficiencies which need to be healed by the Gospel: machismo [male dominance], alcoholism, domestic violence, low mass attendance, fatalistic or superstitious notions which lead to sorcery and the like" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 69)

This letter comes to you in the time of the invisible enemy, COVID-19 causing fear, panic, and death in most countries of the world. It has affected all aspects of our life. We are in a storm of COVID-19, but we are in the boat where Jesus is journeying with us. He will calm the sea in His time (Mk 4:35-41). We continue to pray to God for protection through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Blessed Peter ToRot.

God bless us all in this year of the Laity.



25<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

---

**+ Archbishop Anton Bal,  
President of the CBC-PNGSI**