



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE of Papua New Guinea and Solomon

## PASTORAL LETTER 2024

**Bring children to Jesus**  
*Promotion of vocations among children and young people*

**03 Dec 2023, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent**

Dear People of God in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands,

Greetings from your Bishops!

The Scriptures have many stories where people are brought to Jesus, even where Jesus is brought to children. We are all familiar with the story when people, presumably parents, tried to bring children to Jesus for his blessing but the disciples tried to prevent them. Jesus rebuked the disciples and the way to allow the parents to bring their children to Jesus. The disciples brought a boy with loaves and fish to Jesus so that his small contribution could be used for the blessing of thousands. And Jesus himself was brought to a young girl so that he could raise her to life and go on to live a full life.

We hear many good reports and initiatives implementing the pastoral letter of 2023. Much of what we proposed in our letter of 2023 has been taken and there appears to be a real flourishing of children's ministry and participation.

Now we want to encourage our closest co-workers to strengthen their efforts to bring children and young people to Jesus.

### **Priests**

We note that some priests appear to have a great gift for working with children and we encourage them to continue and share their talents with others. Others find it more challenging, but they can be inspired by their colleagues and work closely with their catechists, youth leaders, and Catholic Religious Education Coordinators.

Be open for the formation of children and youths. Evaluate your schedule to ensure that your time and energy allocation corresponds to the proportion of children and young people in the parish, possibly as much as 70%. See the school as an outstation.

Encourage parents to ensure that their children receive the sacraments. We find that many children are ready and able but not facilitated.

Priests should also establish children and youth ministries in their parishes and give them the human and Christian formation they need to become missionary disciples of Christ. Many of them can learn to become closer to God and to the Church by serving as altar boys and girls and by joining associations like the Association of the Children of Mary, the Missionary Childhood, the Marian Youth and the Legion of Mary. By joining these groups, they sanctify themselves as they also help sanctify others. They evangelize themselves and help evangelize others. It is good to bring children and young people to Mary, the perfect disciple of Christ and Mother of the Church. Through the help of Mary Immaculate they can grow in the imitation of her virtues, esp. purity, humility, obedience and charity which are so important today for young people. It is also good for them to join groups that serve the cause of charity and justice for the poor and the unfortunate, like the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Such groups help young people to break the tendency to be self-centered, and instead think of the good of others and to give themselves to others in love.

**Catechists:** The Holy Father recently published a document endorsing the role of catechist as the teacher of the faith and establishing it as a genuine official ministry. Catechists have always had a prominent role in evangelization and teaching in PNGSI. This role has changed dramatically but is as important as ever, if not more so given the serious decline in the knowledge of the faith among our people.

**Teachers:** all teachers in all schools are communicating their faith, sometimes it is a good faith but sometimes it is a bad “faith”; and sometimes a good faith is communicated well and sometimes it is communicated very poorly. The Catholic teacher should use all the resources he or she has firstly to deepen their own faith, so that a genuine Catholic faith can be communicated to our children and young people. This applies even more so for CRE teachers.

Head teachers and school principals should always uphold the Catholic identity of our Catholic Agency schools and make sure that Catholic Religious Education is faithfully and properly taught to every student, whether Catholic or non-Catholic. The teaching of the Christian faith must be valued as the highest form of education. We should not hesitate to teach the Catholic faith to all students even if they belong to other Christian sects. The Catholic faith that we profess is the faith that comes from Christ and the apostles. We should definitely not proselytize or force any child to become a Catholic. We should however inspire and attract them to the Christian faith not so much by words but by the example of our lives. Parish priests should make sure that all teachers receive adequate faith formation and be joyfully and fully committed in transmitting this to their students. If they are Catholic, they should not just live together with their partner without the sacrament. If they are truly committed to each other, they should not hesitate to get married in the Church and to love each other as Christ loves the Church. If Christ is at the center of their married life, they will be able to reflect the love of Christ to their students.

**Parents:** You are with your children more than anyone else. Teach them to pray and pray with them. Take them to church. Make sure that they receive the sacraments, baptism, confirmation, penance, and Eucharist. Provide a healthy environment of love and self-discipline. Involve them in acts of service to those in need.

The education of children in the faith starts at home. It is “the place where parents pass on the faith to their children” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 66). Parents are the first teachers of the faith. By loving and caring for their children and through the power of positive parenting, they are already teaching them about God because God is love. At the same time, parents should not hesitate to speak to their children about God and about Jesus Christ and teach them how to pray and live good moral lives as children of God.

Parents, teachers and elders should also provide children and young people with the necessary personal accompaniment they need. They should lovingly talk to them, listen to their problems, and help them discern what is God’s will for them. They should also make sure that children do not suffer from physical, sexual or emotional abuse. For this reason, there should be in every parish Child Protection officers who will protect and promote the dignity and rights of the child. Those guilty of child sex abuse are to be reported to the authorities. At the same time children should also be corrected when they do something wrong. This should always be done with love. They should, however, not overly correct them lest they get discouraged and rebel against authority.

In the spirit of Synodality, we urge our lay people to actively participate in our faith formation so that they can meaningfully promote an atmosphere of listening, participate in the decision making and build up the community of faith.

Although we have achieved a great deal, there is much more to do. Let us continue to work together for the benefit of our children.

God bless you all,

**+ OTTO SEPARY**

Bishop of Bereina

President of CBC- PNGSI