

## CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MENDI

P.O. Box 69, Mendi, SHP 251  
Phone: 675-549-1002 \* FAX: 675- 549-1460  
Email: dlippert.mendi@gmail.com

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### *Office of the Bishop*

Fr Victor Roche, SVD  
General Secretary  
CBC PNGSI

2 March 2018

Prot 47/2018

Dear Father Victor,

You asked me to put together something on the recent earthquake that affected the two provinces that comprise our diocese (Southern Highlands and Hela) and beyond. (In the process of writing this, I have felt three minor temors shaking the house. There have been countless aftershocks.)

I am happy to report that all of our mission personnel are safe and sound. Sadly, dozens of our people lost their lives, mainly caused by landslides. Four young girls were crushed by a falling wall as they slept in their home in Mendi town. Also in Mendi a young couple and their first born child – relatives of Father Pius Hal – were killed by a landslide in the Magani area. They were overnighting there because there was no PMV to take them home that evening. Many more died here and in Hela. Please pray for all those who lost their lives.

Other people lost homes and gardens because of landslides, but there doesn't seem to be a humanitarian crisis at the moment, because most of our people live in simple bush buildings and so avoided the one of the greatest dangers of earthquakes ... falling objects.

The same cannot be said for the church, business and government which have established physical infrastructures. Like all other dioceses, the Diocese of Mendi has systems of schools and health centres, built mainly around our thirty-one parishes and over 330 rural outstations nestled in the rugged mountainous terrain of the diocese.

Until now – the fourth day since the disaster – we have been challenged in our efforts to conduct an adequate audit of damages sustained... due in large part to the lack of Digicel service... which only in the last hours has begun to work again to a very limited degree. Travel is also hampered by landslides (and the ugly practice of roadblocks extorting money from those wishing to pass through.)

Initial reports are sketchy but I can share the following:

While the devastating 7.5 magnitude quake was felt as far as Goroka and beyond, and damage was reported in Hagen and other places further east, our Eastern Deanery was spared the worst of the earthquake – Erave being the exception, where damages to the priest house at the main station are

being reported. Pangia reports little to no damage. Ialibu sustained damage to water tanks... No reports from Muli, Komakul and other parishes. Some damage to the priest house and convent at Kagua is reported. Of course, everywhere, anything on tables, shelves, cabinets was shaken to the ground and much was broken.

In the Central Deanery, there are more reports of damage. Here in Mendi, the Cathedral is alright. The FCC Sisters, the FSM Sisters and the MC Sisters are not in their convents because of damages sustained. Epeanda clinic is closed until a damage assessment can be done. Water tanks damaged at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, the Catechist Training Center and the Diocesan Priest house.. Solar hot water systems shaken from many roofs. Some damage to the Cathedral primary school, which is closed at the moment.

Great damage to the priest house at Ekari, Upper Mendi. Other buildings on the station also damaged. No reports from outstations.

The further west you travel, the more damage is being reported – which is what you would expect since the epicenter was about 15 km from Komo towards Mount Bosavi.

At Lake Kutubu the priest house sustained serious damage. Father Peter Kim has set up a large tent, where he and many parishioners are sheltering during the nights until more permanent arrangements can be made. The parish motorboat – used to attend to the two island outstations – was damaged.

The Det church was damaged and is leaning. The priest house and convent sustained damages. Damages too to the school and clinic there. The church at the Unja outstation, located on the Highlands Highway was flattened. More destruction reported from other outstations.

At Nipa too, damages being reported at the main station and several outstations. The Sisters' convent in Nipa was completely destroyed. (No Sisters stationed there at present.) Damages to water tanks and solar also reported. School and staff houses also sustained severe damage. Other outstations yet to report.

Some minor damage at the main station in Margarima (the first parish coming into the Hela Province). Some auxiliary buildings flattened. Damages reported at the school and convent. The church building at one of the first outstations of Margarima after leaving Nipa – Hones – is completely destroyed. Other outstations have not reported in yet but damage is expected.

Coming down out of the Tari Gap into the Tigibi outstation of the Hulia Parish, severe damage being reported at the school, including staff houses and at the church. At Dabaraba the main station of the Hulia Parish, there is severe damage reported to the priest house and pastoral center being reported. Other outstations have not reported in as yet.

Severe damage being reported at Tari Secondary School. FCC Sisters convent there is rendered uninhabitable. Several classrooms and staff houses completely levelled to the ground.

The priest house at the main station in Tari was shaken off of its posts and is leaning. The friars have been sleeping in their cars. The large Saint Francis Church, built fifty years ago was shaken

severely, and structural damage is suspected. Damage to school, staff houses and clinic reported there.

At the main station of Pureni, the large clinic is destroyed. Staff houses have collapsed. The school is damaged. Some damage also to the church. Outstations have not reported in.

Have not been able to directly contact our large station at Koroba. But reports of severe damage to priest house, convent, school and staff houses being reported.

Have not been able to reach anyone at our parish at Lake Kopiago, but because of it's location, grave damage is suspected.

At Irawi (near Komo) great damage being reported at the main station. The priest house completely destroyed. Convent sustained severe damage. Classrooms and staff houses collapsed. Church building severely damaged. New church at Kulu outstation sustained structural damage.

Our large station at Komo is reporting structural damage to the church and serious damage to the priest house, convent, school and staff houses. Outstations have not reported in so far.

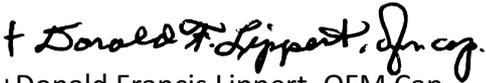
As we enter into the daunting task of rebuilding, I realize that we could really use the services of a structural engineer, perhaps working with an architect who could inspect some of the above-mentioned buildings and determine their structural integrity and then propose needed remedial measures (as well as costings). I don't know if there would be funding available for this very crucial service.

At this stage, I do not have a monetary figure to place on the measures need to respond to all of these damages. I hope, after the upcoming Priest Senate meeting next week, that I will be ready to give an intial estimate. I will urge local communities to respond to this disaster as best as they can, and contribute to the rebuilding of their facilities. I can guarantee, that the Diocese will keep strict and transparent accounting of all funds contributed in solidarity, and provide whatever reports or acquittals are required to those who assist us in their charity in this our dark hour of need.

"If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour."

Many thanks Father Victor for your much appreciated support and concern.

Fraternally,

  
+Donald Francis Lippert, OFM Cap.  
Bishop of Mendi

