

Community Routes

Two New Pacific Provinces

Daniel, former Minister General SSF writes:

2009 will be the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the work of the Society of Saint Francis in the South Pacific. It was in 1959 that Brother Geoffrey went to Papua New Guinea. Therefore it is with great joy that we welcome the news from the recent meeting of the First Order Chapters that the Pacific Islands Province will become the Papua New Guinea Province and the Province of the Solomon Islands. A fitting way to mark the 50th anniversary.

Geoffrey arrived in Papua New Guinea in 1959, first of all going to St. Francis parish, Koki, in Port Moresby then to Jegaratta (as they were then called) in Popondetta province. We remember with thanks the contribution made by Brothers Geoffrey, Alfred and Gordon now departed, and Andrew (who is still in the country), all from the UK. Also Philip and Timothy Joseph, indigenous brothers, who have also since died. The early work involved running a number of parishes in Port Moresby, beginning St. Francis School at Koki, building the friary at Jegaratta (now Haruro) running an Evangelist College alongside the friary and making many patrols into the various districts.

Early in our time in PNG Michael Davis a Solomon Islander and former Melanesian Brother who had worked for years in the Highlands of PNG joined us at Haruro. He was followed by Colin, and Comins Romano and a number of other Solomon Islands men who wanted to test their vocation in the Franciscan Life. With John Chisholm, a member of our Third Order, becoming the new Bishop of Melanesia an invitation was made for our work to begin in the Solomon Islands.

In 1965, SSF had opened work in Brisbane, Australia with five brothers coming out from the UK. Then in 1970 foundations were made in Auckland and Honiara, arising out of links which Geoffrey, as the Minister Provincial, had forged. On St. Clare's Day, 1970, Geoffrey and Daniel arrived in Honiara followed a few weeks later by Michael Davis and Kabay who came by ship from Brisbane. Geoffrey returned to Brisbane and Gerard joined the team a little later. From the earliest days great support was given by the Church of Melanesia, both in finance and the building of Patteson House for the SSF brothers and Community of the Sisters of the Church (CSC). This house was named after Bishop Patteson the first Bishop of Melanesia, and was built in the Centenary year of his martyrdom. From the beginning in Honiara we decided that we had to learn Pidgin, the language that most people in Honiara spoke, but also following the example of Bishop Patteson who had said when first bringing the gospel to the Islands. "Our work is to introduce Christ to the people, and then they will know what in their customs is against Christ and therefore what is to be discarded". This was very different to the approach of other missionary groups who wanted to change everything, making the people give up much of their culture. Therefore we felt that we were to introduce St. Francis and SSF to the Solomons, but that any development must be truly Melanesian in character.

Over the years there has been much expansion of the work and ministry, and I must give thanks to Brian, Francis, Geoffrey Leonard, Giles, Michael Davis, Colin, Comins Romano, and so many of the first Solomon Island brothers.

My prayer is that both of our new provinces continue to grow in a truly Melanesian way, and always be looking outward to develop new ways of ministry and bring Christ after the manner of Francis to their fellow Melanesians.

Cyclone Guba and Two PNG Friaries

In some parts of the world, news still travels slowly, and it was only at the First Order Chapters that we heard of how the brothers in Papua New Guinea had been affected by something that in the UK newspapers was a mere snippet of news.

Cyclone Guba struck Oro Province in PNG in November 2007, washing away eight villages and devastating many more by wind and rain. Oswald was among the brothers living at Newton College, and was in one of the four groups which the Bishop of Popendetta sent out to assess the situation and report back to him. Many people were dead, houses were damaged almost beyond repair and vegetable gardens were covered in mud, sand and debris. The Anglican Church played a leading role in the rescue and relief efforts. The Australian government responded two days after the cyclone hit, the PNG government about two weeks later. Many other countries also provided assistance, and all the C/SSF provinces sent money. The brothers gave away everything that was sent to them and lived on little more than navy biscuits for a couple of months. The bishop had expressly said that supplies were to be given to all people, regardless of their church membership, a generosity which surprised many ex-Anglicans who had joined other churches and who have since returned to the Anglican Church as it had met them in their time of need.

Also in Papua New Guinea, the brothers are to rename St Margaret's Friary at Katerada, Oro Bay, in memory of Geoffrey, the first SSF brother in PNG. A new friary is to be established at Jimi, in the PNG highlands, where Justus died in December 2006, the first missionary to die in the highlands. The new friary will be named after Justus. The people of Jimi said to the brothers that they felt very honoured that a foreigner would want so much to bring the gospel to them that he would give up his life in the process, so a memorial service is to be held there each December.



Geoffrey Friary & Chapel, Katerada

Europe goes East

CSF has two new sisters - in Korea. Frances and Jemma, members of the Korean Franciscan Sisterhood, which has been in covenant with CSF for some years, applied to join CSF at the First Order Sisters' Chapter in Stroud, Australia. The sisters accepted their request with joy, and decided that Frances and Jemma would belong to the European Province. It is hoped that in due course they will become a Region of the Province, allowing them more autonomy to continue to build up the Franciscan life in Korea.

Praying for the Lambeth Conference

Dorothy Brooker TSSF Minister General, writes of a Third Order initiative:

Some time ago, a small seed was planted, suggesting a commitment by the Third Order internationally to have a prayer presence and a place of hospitality alongside the Lambeth Conference. As the seed began to germinate, at the Ministers' Meeting last year the process of making it a reality was given a framework.

Each province compiled a list of all the bishops who had some Franciscan connection either as TO members, Bishop Protector or Companion/Associate. I wrote to each bishop assuring them of our prayer support in the time of preparation and informing them of our intention to have a prayer presence in Canterbury during the Conference. Most of the practicalities landed on Richard Bird the Minister Provincial for Europe and John Morrison, Provincial Secretary. The trustees of Greyfriars gave permission for the use of the site and with the generous support of the First Order brothers living there, the hard work began. The John Adam tent, so named after the tertiary whose legacy enabled its purchase, was a great place for offering hospitality and was set up in the beautiful garden of the Master's Lodge, adjacent to Greyfriars.

The daily programme was eventually set:

9 am - Morning Prayer and TO Community Obedience

10 - 11 - am Bible Study following the 'signs' from John's gospel which had been prepared for those attending Lambeth and made available via the internet.

12 midday - Eucharist

2 - 3 pm - a time of contemplative prayer, replaced on Fridays by a walking of the Stations of the Cross in the Greyfriars garden.

5.30 pm - Evening Prayer.

All this with times of great hospitality in between, visits from bishops and their spouses, TO members travelling from all over the UK to join us for one or two, or even three days. Those of us who had committed ourselves for the three weeks came from Canterbury, other parts of England, Wales, New York and New Zealand. The presence of Jean CSF, Eric Michael SSF and Maximilian Kolbe N/SSF was a visible reminder of our larger Franciscan family. Maximilian Kolbe described the prayer presence as one of the significant moments in his formation, a special blessing of affirmation to the TO team. Another moving contribution was a TO group from Blackmore Vale (Dorset) who sent a prayer support card daily, a wonderful reminder that we were not alone. The Very Rev. Rowan Smith, Dean of St George's Cathedral,

Capetown, also brought a card of prayer support from the TO in Capetown. We were constantly aware that prayer was happening in all places. The times of hospitality were important moments of listening and sharing and the gratitude expressed by the bishops who visited was very humbling.

As we met and prayed we were also conscious of what was happening up the hill at the university. The Lambeth Conference Chaplaincy Team and their presence of prayer; reminders each day of the Bishops' Conference and the Spouses' Conference as we looked at their daily programme which then became the focus of our prayer.

I am grateful for the enthusiasm and the hard work that was so generously given; the love and open generosity that the Canterbury brothers, Colin Wilfred, Austin and Reginald, gave under difficult circumstances because of the Master's Lodge renovations being behind schedule. God truly blessed the prayer presence.

We continue to pray for the bishops and their spouses who attended the Lambeth Conferences, for those who declined the invitation, for those not invited, for our Society of St Francis and our call to respond to the voice of Christ and hear like Francis his plea "repair my house".

'Nun in a tent?'

Last September nine monks and nuns, friars and sisters of different Anglican Religious Communities were at Southwark Cathedral for an event called 'Life Prayer'. From CSF and SSF there were Jennifer Chan, Bart and Colin Wilfred. As well as sharing in the regular pattern of prayer and worship, meeting with different age groups, running workshops and giving talks they were meeting many of the hundreds of visitors and tourists passing through the cathedral each day.

Part of this was done by staffing a tent by the main door with a monk/nun/friar/sister. Many interesting and profound conversations and opportunities for prayer and ministry happened with casual passers by, not least during the well known Borough Market, a popular place for 'foodies'.

Altogether it was a splendid showcase for Anglican religious life and we're grateful to the Diocesan Missioner, Canon Michael Hart for inviting us.

Moving on....

There have been a number of changes in houses and friaries in 2008 - the Walsingham friary opened and the brothers moved out from Birmingham around Easter; the brothers in Canterbury moved into new quarters in August; the Stepney members moved to St Mary's Vicarage, Plaistow in September; SSF started a new venture in Leeds in October; and the CSF Brixton house will close as the St Alphege Community House opens at the beginning of February, 2009. Some of the moves are ones that C/SSF chose, others are forced upon us by circumstances: always there is the offer of new possibilities of ministry and the sharing of gifts. The move itself is always hard

work, as many of our readers will testify when they have had to move house, and settling in to a new location is always a challenge.

Round up

Jenny Tee has been elected to first profession and the liturgy will take place on 24 January. James Anthony and Kentigern John have moved, from Holy Island and St Matthias' Vicarage respectively, to establish a new house in Harehills, a predominantly Muslim area of some social need in Leeds. The sisters at Brixton will move to Southwark early in 2009. It is hoped to report more fully on these new ventures in a future edition. Ezekiel Kelly, Hartman Dena, Samson Amoni and Worrick have been in various houses in the UK since contributing to the Lambeth Conference Chaplaincy team in July. They have now moved on to the Province of the Americas. Nathanael and Larry have moved to Glasshampton, from Doncaster and Hilfield respectively, and Peter has moved from Glasshampton to St Matthias' Vicarage. George has been elected Minister of the new Province of the Solomon Islands and Laurence Hauje Minister of the Papua New Guinea Province. The Archbishop of Perth, Roger Herft has succeeded George Connor as Bishop Protector General for the whole of SSF. In the Third Order, the Reverend Joanna Coney has succeeded the Venerable Richard Bird as Minister Provincial for the European Province. Cuthbert has withdrawn from the noviciate. Augustine Thomas and Oswin Paul have been released from life vows and membership of SSF. *f*