

## **'Oro, Oro, Oro'**

### *Fifty Years of SSF in Papua New Guinea*

### **Giles SSF**



In 1959 four brothers of the Society of St Francis established the Anglican Franciscan life in Papua New Guinea. This took place after the Diocesan Bishop of New Guinea, Bishop Strong, had persuaded the First Order Brothers' Chapter in England to send brothers there. The Chapter was at first reluctant to do so but eventually agreed to Bishop Strong's plea for brothers and his conviction, later proved correct, that Christian men in Papua New Guinea would be interested in living the religious life.

Geoffrey was chosen to lead the group and he was to be assisted by Andrew, Mark and Stephen Lambert. Geoffrey went first and established community life at the Anglican Mission, Koki, in Port Moresby. Soon he was joined by a young volunteer, Christopher Richards, and later on by the other three brothers. After they had settled in, the search began for an appropriate place to establish a training friary for Papuan and other Island brothers. Eventually a site at Jegarata (now called Haruro) was chosen, near Popondetta in the then Northern, now Oro, Province of Papua. Work soon began on the friary buildings and eventually the Franciscan life was established there.

It was at this friary, dedicated to St Mary of the Angels, that on July 26th 2009, a great celebration was held to commemorate fifty years of Franciscan life in the Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea and the establishment last year of the Papua New Guinea Province of the Society. Preparations for the celebration had begun weeks before and great quantities of vegetables and other food were given by local villagers, together with five pigs. Camp sites had been established around the friary, firewood cut, shelters from the sun constructed, so that the hundreds of people who attended the celebration could do so as comfortably and conveniently as possible. Members of the Third Order and Companions of the Society made their contribution to the work. In the villages men and women practised their Orakaiva and other dances and welcoming songs so that visitors could be welcomed with due respect and during the feast dances could be performed.

A festive welcome was given when visitors from overseas arrived at the airstrip near Popondetta. Among these visitors were Clark Berge, Minister General SSF from USA, Brian from New Zealand, Alfred Boonkong, Minister Provincial of the ANZ Province, George, Minister of the Province of the Solomon Islands, Giles from the European Province, Comins Romano from the Solomon Islands, the Revd Dorothy Brooker, Minister General of the Third

Order SSF from New Zealand, and the Revd Dr Christopher Richards, a Companion from Bristol, England, who was the very volunteer who had spent that first year with the brothers at Koki. It was his first visit for fifty years! As the group of visitors approached the friary triton trumpet shells were blown, drums began to beat, and the great Orakaiva welcoming greeting 'Oro, Oro, Oro,' was sung out. Then the magnificently attired men and women dancers led the visitors into the friary area with songs and dances. After this joyous welcome things quietened down until the Saturday evening when there was a service of Evensong at which Giles preached. He had been at Koki from 1965 to 1969 and then had been Minister of the Pacific Islands Province in the 1990's, .

On the Sunday morning the Bishop of Popondota, the Rt Revd Joe Kopapa, celebrated the Eucharist in the friary chapel. He was assisted by three retired bishops, one of whom, Bishop Tevita Talanoa had been a SSF brother in the 1960's and is now a tertiary. Clark Berge, Brian and Giles also assisted at the Eucharist. Hundreds of people attended the service which began with dancers leading the procession into the chapel. The Kyrie was sung by some Melanesian Brothers; the Gloria was sung and danced by members of the Jonita Sunday School. The Old Testament reading was read by the Revd Dorothy Brooker, the Epistle by Anthony, one of the senior Papuan brothers. After the Gospel Procession was sung and danced by New Britain students from Newton Theological College, Giles read the Gospel. The special preacher for the Eucharist was Brian who had spent many years in Papua New Guinea after arriving there in 1961, and who had visited many times when Minister General. He told the story of the decision of SSF to go to Papua New Guinea and of life and work in the early days. Then he looked forward to the future with hope and confidence, commending the brothers to the prayers of the church. During the liturgy various choirs, including the Sisters of the Community of the Visitation of our Lady and members of the Saint Margaret Nursing School, sang different parts. It was a wonderful service with great hymn singing, joy and thanksgiving being expressed.

After the service the Dirita dancers led the clergy, brothers and congregation to the memorial altar and cross in the friary grounds. Here Clark Berge blessed and unveiled a commemorative plaque given by the European Province. Both living and departed brothers who had served in Papua New Guinea were remembered: among them Geoffrey, Mark and Stephen Lambert. Also remembered were Philip, Alfred and Justus, and Andrew, the only one of the original group of Brothers who is still alive. He left Papua New Guinea last year after 49 years of service as a doctor and psychiatrist. Greetings were extended to him at the House of the Divine Compassion, Plaistow.

Finally, a great feast was held accompanied by dancing, speeches and presentations. It was a glorious day and a fitting celebration of fifty years of SSF in Papua New Guinea. Great thanks and congratulations are due to Brother Laurence Hauje, Minister of the Papua New Guinea Province, Wallace Yovero, Guardian of the friary, Selwyn, Oswald, and all the brothers

of the Province for making such a day so successful. All who attended gave thanks for the past fifty years as they looked forward to the next fifty years! *f*