



Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

The Third Order, Society of St Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Pentecost 2023

Regional visit to PNG

**Mandy Wheatley,
Provincial Minister**

Dear Franciscan Family,

From the moment I stepped into the role of Provincial Minister in 2020, I have been very aware of the connectedness of our Third Order family around the world. We all live and pray daily for one another with a rule that follows the example of Francis and Clare. We are connected by our Community Obedience, which in spite of language and culture differences, ties us together with bonds of love, peace and joy, and values of humility, justice and service.

This is what brings harmony to our very different lives all over the earth, including our family in PNG. On 22 March, I was blessed to fly with Br Christopher John, Minister General of the First Order SSF, to Popondetta, and six days later, to fly to Alotau (near Dogura in Milne Bay) with Rita Simeni.

Of course, I can't include all our adventures in this article, so I offer some insights.

I was struck by the Melanesian way of welcoming strangers into their homes,



On patrol to Kokoda – St Michael and All Angels School and Church – Front Row L-R: Gibland Arahu, Harry Kivaja, Dicksaford Kavo, Conrad Ondirari; Back Row L-R: Cedrick Peuba, Rogil Urisi, Mandy Wheatley, Olivia Deiko Arahu, Bishop Jo Kopapa, Nigel Tauni, Melecent Kivaja, Holland Siremi

communities and families. It was a humbling experience to have 30 – 40 men, women and children sing us a welcome at every village, church and school we visited along the way. They decorated us, and the places in which we met, with colourful flowers and offered songs of praise to God, with traditional costumes, drums and guitars upon our arrival. We processed to a gathering place for speeches of welcome. Gifts were presented and responses made, then a feast, photos and quick chat before heading to the next church, chapel and village.



Women preparing lunch in Winnifred's kitchen, Kokoda parish. L-R: Winifred Talanoa, Rita Simeni, Noreen Kahari

In Papua there are over 800 languages spoken among 7.3 million people. 80% of the population live in remote rural areas without electricity, shops, roads or access to markets. Many mothers told me of children who had died from a combination of poor diet, sickness and lack of access to medical care.

Priests and theological students don't receive stipends from their dioceses. They must grow their own food in small garden plots, and if they can afford it, add fish, chickens (for eggs) and pigs. 90% of the population identify as Christian; however, most people only receive education to year 6 level, so superstition and sorcery are still strong in remote places.

None the less, these are people who endure these hardships and griefs with humility and generosity. They are fiercely loyal to God and God's people. Every step I took proved that. I never felt unsafe – there was always a man with a machete escorting me through the bush or town. (Sometimes at 4.00 o'clock in the morning to catch a ride to the airport!) There was always a woman with good English at my side to explain what was happening, and guide me to the next person for introductions and information.

There was always kindness shown to us. Rita is especially respected by all. Everyone loves and values her wisdom.

One of my greatest concerns is the inability for the PNG Third Order to communicate with each other over vast distances and with the outside world. The postal system is still operating well, which means Manuals, Prayer Cycles and Newsletters are received at the two main distribution points, Popondetta and Alotau. It also means that you can write to novices and tertiaries, assuring them of your love and prayers.

The bigger problem remains with technological services as most of the Regional Ministers and Area Convenors have no reliable access to smart phones, electricity, computers, printers or internet reception.

We take so much for granted in Australia!

Still, the Third Order grows. There are many Mothers Union women skilled in administration and English who are keen to become novices in Kokoda. There are 15 novices in Alotau who will be professed when I return next year. Novice counsellors, convenors and regional ministers are doing their best to train and tell stories of Francis despite having minimal books and supplies of stationery.

Every year, Michael Hirodidi, either by himself, or with a few tertiaries, will travel for weeks at a time by dingy and foot to walk on patrol to isolated villages, sleeping rough and sharing God's love and the principles of the Third Order with remote communities. They need supplies of large print Bibles, stationery, and teaching books for those with little



Friary, Popondetta

English to train novices to become well-formed Christians before profession.

In Kokoda, Father Leonard Jinga walks along the road to Popondetta (70km) visiting villages. Both he and Michael say they love

meeting people, talking with them on the way, perhaps helping them and sharing about Jesus and St Francis. Conrad Ondirari, a youth leader in Togaho parish, brings people together with his guitar, singing gospel songs and leading worship services. Conrad, Michael Hirodidi and Br Wallace in Alotau have each built local chapels near their homes from bush materials to enable the surrounding village families to gather in worship.

The PNG tertiaries everywhere thank you for your prayers and faithfulness. They send their love to you and were so delighted to see someone from Australia come and visit them in their country.

I found this quote which describes their faith as I experienced it being lived out; 'The distance between heaven and earth collapsed when we worshipped and prayed.'



Welcome feast at Philip Beiawa Friary, Ukaka, Alotau. L-R Zebedee Kenanido, Peter Dagiwaime, Anselm Rupusina, Fr Thomas Waga, Br Wallace Yavero

Prayers for Rita You may remember my provincial request to pray for Rita who was unwell and exhausted by all the preparation she undertook before my arrival, and faced a further 11 days of travelling with me. Those who were visiting the Friary (12 people) in Popondetta slept in one room (on the floor) under our single room accommodation



Creek with clear water

upstairs. For two nights, Br Chris and I heard singing and prayer as we fell asleep which continued all night until we woke the next morning. They were worshipping God around Rita before we did our big trips. Thus she was able to keep up the pace and sleep at night with the help of their prayers.

Environmental concerns The palm oil plantations are vast, causing displacement of

villagers from their water sources and traditional lands. They then undertake hard and dangerous labour for the multinational companies who profit from these monocultures. To read more see Global Witness: <https://tinyurl.com/2h2uxmh2>

I took this photo of a palm oil truck on its side after an accident, leaking its cargo of oil



into the creek as we drove back to Popondetta from Kokoda. Also in that area, where Rita was born, a newly established mine site is pouring waste tailings into the creek where her family grew up and lived for generations. It makes the water undrinkable. Rita is the only

member of her family protesting to the company and government. Everyone else is happy with payouts and dirty water.

In conclusion: All the Franciscans I met in PNG are aware, educated and longing to see their beautiful country given opportunities to share the gospel values of peace and education, healing and neighbourly kindness. This is the message of Francis to love all people and the creation around them. To do so they are prepared to work hard and learn, travel enormous distances, sharing and teaching. They continue to need our prayers, faithfulness, love and resources to do so.

I am looking to form a small team to help me gather donations to purchase large print Bibles and smart phones for the Regional Ministers and Area Convenors (five in total). This team would help to produce an easy-to-read formation book for Franciscan enquirers, designed to help with simple literacy skills, and put together packs of stationery such as pens, pencils, crayons and exercise books. If you are interested in doing this, or would like to connect with individuals by letter, please let me know.

Meanwhile, pray!! For a helpful resource, see: <https://tinyurl.com/muper25j>



Brother Christopher John SSF, Sister Beverley, CVL and the Rev'd Mandy Wheatley, Provincial Minister TSSF

TSSF HOUSEKEEPING:

I appreciate your prayers for the following:

Chapter: 15–18 June at the Old

Monastery, Stroud. Now is the time to let your Regional Minister or Provincial Secretary know about any issues that may need to come to Chapter for discussion. We also love to hear of innovative projects and inspiring activities of our TSSF members, and give thanks to God for your faithfulness.

Inter Provincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC) Sally Buckley (WA) and Hyeran Helena Yang (South Korea) are joining me as representatives for the Province of Asia-Pacific at IPTOC, to be held at High Leigh, north of London 2–13 Sept. There will be three representatives from each of the other provinces: the Americas, Africa, Europe and Pacific, as we join with the SSF Brothers and Sisters to reflect on where we've come from, where we are at now, and where we plan to go in the next three years. I would appreciate your input as they have asked for Provinces to submit concerns, comments and things that have been going on in our province.

If you have moved or need to update or change your contact details, you can do so on our website: <https://tinyurl.com/398hf8uh> or contact David, our Communications Officer.



Youth leader Conrad Ondirari with his wife Dorothy and their son

Ballina floods

Richard Brown tssf

My phone rang at 3.30 am on 1st March 2022, informing me that I should evacuate immediately due to the flood waters coming down from Lismore. I live 800 metres from the Richmond River, with a channel estate across the street. It has never flooded, but knowing the flood waters were coming down the river, I got up and walked towards the ferry, just to see how high the river was. I was about half way to the ferry when it started to rain so back home and into bed.



Floods in Ballina, March 2022

The phone rang at 7.00am telling me to evacuate immediately, so I walked down towards the ferry and there was water across the Burns Ferry Road, which happens at large high tides. So back home for breakfast.

After breakfast I walked down to the end of our street where it meets Burns Point Ferry Road and the water had come right up to the junction of my street and it was not even high tide. Looking over to the houses built on the channel, the water level was lapping the top of the bank.

At the peak of high tide the flood waters had broken the banks of the homes built on the channel, gone through the homes and onto the street. The complex where I live has six town houses and eighteen low set homes. The drainage within our complex started to overflow and the flood waters were creeping up the drive-ways. At high tide our complex was completely surrounded by water. Then at the turn of the tide the water started to retreat. At low tide I and many others walked down our street to the corner only to find Burns

Point Ferry Road still covered with water, knee deep.

As the kitchen is downstairs, my wife cooked all the food we had, filled our bath tub with water and started to move our furniture up stairs. The next high tide the flood waters came in faster and into all the homes in our street, even into the shopping complex just 500 metres up the road. Just under a foot of water came into our town house. The people in the low set homes evacuated to the emergency centres but most of the occupants living in the six town houses remained.

We lost power for six days and also had difficulty with communication as both land-line and mobile phones were out most of the time. We heated pre-cooked food and boiled water on the portable electric BBQ with a steel flower pot stand, the outer part of a steel army helmet and fire starters, standing in knee deep

water at times. We had our neighbours over for meals as they could not cook.

I felt like Noah – our house was like the ark with water all around. The flooding came and went at each high tide for about three days.

Ballina one year later

Over twelve months later, Richard and his wife are still living upstairs, cheerfully managing with make-shift cooking facilities, as the one-storey houses in their complex are being repaired first.

Raelee Garner, the only other tertiary in Ballina, was not flooded as her retirement village is on higher ground. Raelee, who was born in nearby Byron Bay and knows the area well, said the floods in Ballina were a shock as the town has never flooded before.

Many other people in the northern NSW region were impacted by the floods, with some still waiting for repairs or re-building of their houses.

A Prayer:

Healing Lord,
We bring before you our damaged lives
and our imperfect world.
Give us patience and a clear mind as we
clear debris and await recovery.
Help us to love the precious gift that we
have inherited
And never take what we own in this
world for granted.
Never let us forget that the true reward
and eternal happiness rest with you in
your glory.
So may we strive to live to your honour
until that day arrives.
Amen

Gemma Dashwood, Provincial Chaplain



a safe place
charles ringma

is there the safest of places for us –
the satiated consumers
the weary workers
the worried parents
the fearful citizens
the struggling persons of faith?

are these places –
at a lover's breast
in indulgent leisure
in a new relationship
in the places of prayer?

or are we condemned –
to the longest longing
the endless seeking
the restless heart
the wayward journey?

is this safe place –
a destination
an inner condition
the fruit of faith
a fragile friendship?

can we hold it in our hands?
can it nestle in a broken heart?
can it descend into fearful places?
can it well-up in desert spaces?

yes. it can!



Joan Grace tssf OAM

1936–2023

Joan Grace, a Victorian tertiary for 28 years, was the founder of the Francis Foundation, a residential home in Warrnambool for men with mental health issues.

Victorian tertiaries remember many happy gatherings with Joan at the Francis Foundation, where residents would provide the lunch and join in with the Franciscan group. Joan had a great gift for hospitality, making everyone feel welcomed and loved.

A Requiem Eucharist for Joan was held at Christ Church Anglican in Warrnambool on 29th March this year, and was also live-streamed. The video recording can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/2p94d3me/>.

The Rev'd Hayden McKellar tssf was involved in planning and conducting the service, along with the rector, Fr Scott Lowrey. Joan's Franciscan walk was very much part of the service.

Joan's grand daughter Sarah delivered one part of the eulogy. An excerpt follows:

'Nan had an amazing life, which is represented in a quote I found written by Nan: "The many blessings I have from all this time never ceases to amaze me, wouldn't change a thing!"

Joan Alison Grace was born on the 4th of February 1936 in Melbourne. She was born to Sarah and Norman Lucas and then loved by her step father George. For the first few years of her life, she lived in inner-city Melbourne. A highlight of those times was the opportunity to attend Sunday school at Bethany Hall at her local church. This was a very special time in her life. Not only was this the origin of her faith but it was where Nan found examples of the kindness and care she was to carry throughout her life and share with others.

Later, Nan proudly became a Franciscan to further explore and embody her faith. Nan's first job was with the Bank of NSW where she was a bank teller. She married in Deniliquin,



A Third Order gathering at the Francis Foundation, 2017. L–R: Hayden McKellar, Joan Grace, Pirrial Clift, Sandra Jackson, Barry Thompson, Jan Down, Colin Valentine, Michael Down

NSW, and became a mother. She dedicated her time to her family and to working in her community. She became a Brownie leader, which she did for many years.

After several moves between different states and towns, Nan settled in Port Fairy and loved it there. Living close to the beach, her love of shells showed in a collection which grew larger and larger. She was part of the church community and made many friends.

Nan finally settled in Warrnambool in her little unit, which she was so proud to own. In keeping with her generosity and caring nature, we have all, at some stage, been fortunate to share her unit with her.

Nan was involved with the Francis Foundation for 42 years. She was a carer, administrator, and fundraiser, working tirelessly to keep the organisation going. Nan was recognised for her outstanding volunteer work with many awards. Most significantly, she received the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2012. We are so proud of Nan for this achievement and I think she was pretty chuffed herself.'

Acting on climate change

Jan Down

There are workaholics all over our rosemary bush, hundreds of them.

When we arrived here two years ago, we didn't see a single bee. We planted our stunted little rosemary that we'd brought with us from our old place, and it took off. Now it is ten times the size and the bees are so happy.

I sometimes laugh at the over-abundance of God with the herbs. One rosemary bush could surely supply our whole street!

What if churches had herb gardens? No one would need to buy expensive bunches.

Everyone could just wander in and pick them to take home and add excitement to simple, home-cooked meals. What riches! In this part of the

Province, rosemary and sage bushes, thyme as a ground cover, and a large parsley patch would go a long way. Crops of basil and oregano in spring and summer would take it further.

These days I am connecting more dots when it comes to acting on climate change. Everything matters and everything is connected: biodiversity; clean water and air; healthy soil; farming and the globalised food market; how the church kitchen deals with waste and what it puts in the sandwiches.

Resilience and adaptation matter as well as mitigation because so much future global warming is already locked in. For example, more shady trees could help to cool buildings during worsening heat waves when the air-conditioners can't do enough. There are so many little things that can be done, as well as the big things. Our Franciscan calling to living simply is an important aspect.

Here in Gippsland, in the south-east corner of Victoria, a new group has started within our Anglican Diocese. It is called ACTinG: Acting

on Climate Together in Gippsland. We are thankful to have a bishop, the Rt Rev'd Dr Richard Treloar, who is so supportive and encouraging. He has been part of the group from its inception about a year ago.

At Synod last year the Diocese passed a motion to make climate change a focus for the three year cycle of Synod, committing ourselves to learning about climate change, studying the relevant theology, reducing emissions from church buildings and vehicles, encouraging individuals to reduce household emissions, and praying for the well-being of creation.

Since then the ACTinG group has run several webinars with various speakers, emailed ideas to parishes and provided resources on the Diocesan website. The Diocese as a whole has been investigating the purchase of two electric cars – transport being a significant source of emissions in our well spread-out diocese.

The work here is not completely new; it builds on past action and commitments of the Diocese. Solar hot water systems had already been fitted in the Anglican retirement villages, for example. However, we hope that this new initiative will inspire people to go further, given the urgency and the scale of change required.

What is your story? Is there climate action happening in your household, church or TSSF group, or your local community? Could you write something for this page? I suggest about 400 words plus a photo if possible (at least 1MB please). Thank you!

Due-date for next issue: 18/8
Please send contributions to:
jeidown@protonmail.com

