

ONE MOMENT IN TIME

A series on our PNG experience. Part 2

By Dennis Catchpole

My contract with the Archdiocese was to sort out the many lease agreements that the Archdiocese had with the business people.

This had all come about due to a Volcano which erupted in 1994 and buried half the Provincial Capital of Rabaul.

The town had three active Volcanos on its western side, called the Mother and two Daughters, and a smaller one on its eastern side, which was an island in the ocean.

These Volcanos had erupted before, but in 1994 two erupted at the same time. The one called Vulcan which was in the sea, became a fairly large island as a result.

The government decided that the best thing to do would be to relocate the people from the Town of Rabaul, to Kokopo, and set up the provincial government there.



The Catholic church owned a very large plantation, over 1000 acres called Takubar, plus the Mission which was called Vunopope, in the town of Kokopo.

The Mission was established in 1863 on land given to the church by the local Chief, today it covers over 200 acres and has over 70 buildings, including a very modern but Traditional Cathedral.

Rather than sell the land to the Businesses and the Government Departments, the Archdiocese decide to lease the blocks. My job with June as my PA was to sort out the many leases, and contracts.

However, we had only been in PNG a month when the Archbishop asked me if I would take over as the Financial Administrator of the Archdiocese.

Now this was a very different proposition to that which I signed up to, but as volunteers this is often the case that you end up doing something very different.

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In order to understand what we were asked to head, I will just briefly explain the Structure of the Catholic church

The whole world is divided up into Dioceses each controlled by a Bishop. He doesn't own anything, just looks after the assets on behalf of the people.

In a large diocese sometimes, an Archdiocese is formed and this is run by an Archbishop, as was the case in Rabaul. The highest rank if you like for a lay person in a diocese or Archdiocese, is the Financial Administrator.



Sunset at Rapopo Beach

Canon law requires that a Bishop has to have a person who has knowledge of Financial matters, and advises the Bishop and his board on Finance, and property and business generally.

This was the role that I was been asked to fill. The Catholic Church has a law called 'Canon law' which runs alongside 'Civil law', in dealing with matters of

finance and property. So before accepting the role I spent some time studying 'Canon Law', so that I could have at least a little knowledge of what my role would be. June was to continue as my PA.

The Archdiocese had 44 Parishes and many more sub Parishes, we had over 140 Schools serving 30.000 children. One College for distance education, two Agriculture/Technical Schools, three vocational Training Centres, two High Schools, one of them, a 400 girls boarding school and one School of Nursing and one Teachers Training College.

On the health side we had a fully equipped 250 bed hospital staffed mostly by Volunteer Doctors from all around the world. Twenty Rural Health Centres with 500 Beds, and Callan services for the Disabled.

In addition to these we had the MSC Sisters order from Germany, the MSC Men's, also from Germany, the FMIs sisters a local order and from Australia an order of Sisters called OLSH (Our Lady of the Sacred Heart)

And as if this was not enough, we had nine Cobra and Coco Plantations, one of 12.000 acres.

So, a very large Organisation' to get my head around.

Dennis