

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

item 278

**"...it's uplifting and lifegiving"**



Maryanne Kolkia rsm [centre] with people from one of the settlements in Goroka, PNG

Growing up in the village of Goglime in Papua New Guinea's Highlands during the 1970s and 80s, **Sr Maryanne Kolkia rsm** was aware of people experiencing poverty but says "it wasn't as evident" as it is now. "There has been a lot of change in a short amount of time," she says.

Poverty levels have increased dramatically throughout the country, and according to Maryanne, the situation is getting worse. Currently, about 40 per cent of the population live on less than \$1 a day; life expectancy and literacy rates are low, while maternal and infant mortality rates are excessively high. PNG also has the highest incidence of HIV in the Pacific region.

In large towns like Goroka and Mt Hagen in the Highlands, rapid urbanisation has contributed to an increase in unemployment, overcrowding, violence and crime. To combat some of these issues, the Sisters of Mercy of PNG, in partnership with Mercy Works Inc. – the relief and development agency of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia – launched a new project in 2006, known as **Mercy Works PNG**.

Maryanne has been involved in the project since the outset and believes it is making an impact by empowering young people and their families in Goroka and Mt Hagen to address the serious problems of poverty, unemployment, domestic violence and HIV-AIDS.

For Maryanne, Papua New Guineans "need to think smart", and crucially, they need to plan for the future, an attribute that isn't strongly evident in PNG culture, she admits.

The team of seven – which includes PNG Sisters of Mercy, Mariska Kua, Theresia Boyek and Claudia Apalenda – has established drop-in and referral centres at Goroka and Mt Hagen which offer skill development workshops, support groups and individual advocacy and referral services. An outreach service is also available to villages beyond these towns. Services covered include human rights awareness, health education, violence prevention, parenting skills, and cooking, sewing, budgeting and income-generation activities.

"It's amazing to see how much we've done," says Maryanne.

But like the people they serve, the Mercy Works team encounter significant hurdles on a regular basis. Maryanne refers to two particular issues: the frustrating inaction of the Government and a poor law and order system unable to cope with disturbing levels of violence and crime.

But these challenges have not deterred Maryanne. While she doesn't condone the behaviour of raskols or those who commit crimes, she has a better understanding of their actions and believes they are victims of their situation. "Now I see them in a different perspective," she explains.

Maryanne is passionate about making a positive difference in her own country and bringing the mercy of God to the individuals she encounters. She believes it is vital "to let people know that someone is listening to them, to bring hope, to help people to believe in themselves, to uplift their lives".

She explains: "When a person looks down and comes into the office and after sitting with me and gives a smile, that's a start... For me I believe in little things".

Maryanne describes her ministry as a privilege: "it's uplifting and life-giving". She says she always had a "yearning" to work with the "poor and needy" in her own country. Before joining the Sisters of Mercy in 1995, she trained and worked as a primary school teacher. She says her time in the classroom fulfilled some of that yearning, but she wanted to do more.

Maryanne acknowledges that PNG lay women – married and single – are doing great things, but she feels empowered by the broader support of the Sisters of Mercy, both her National sisters – who number about 20 – and those throughout the Australian Institute. She is also grateful to other supporters in Australia. "Without their help we would not have done what we have done," she says.



**Maryanne Kolkia rsm – Goroka – PAPUA NEW GUINEA**  
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**item 279**

**AFRICA ITSELF GIVES LIFE...**

On 22-29 October 2014 major superiors, formators, and treasurers of the African countries of Tanzania, Rwanda/Congo, Cameroon, South Africa and India met for an Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa, convened by Sr Izabela Świerad, Superior General, and General Councilors Srs Josephina D'Souza and Stella Holisz. We gathered together to discern our future direction in the context of the present realities of our Congregation, where communities in Europe are decreasing but in African and Asian countries are growing. How do we pass on the burning torch of Divine Love of St Vincent Pallotti?





We began by listening to the history of the mission of the Pallottine Missionary Sisters in South Africa, presented by Sr Boscona Schämänn. Its beginning dates from 1923. Despite restrictions caused by State policies, especially through the influence of apartheid, the Sisters have with great dedication served the children and the sick in five dioceses. The Sisters experienced the initial joy of creating and developing, but later the sadness and difficulty of closing their houses and works. Many of them rest in the cemetery in Cape Town.

Basically our debates, reflections, discussions, and community discernment focused on the issues of formation on the African continent, and possible ways to support the South African province. Together, united in spirit and charism, we looked for ways to establish an International Novitiate to serve both Africa and our international Sister communities.

The meeting ended with a summary and a message from the Superior General. There was a unanimous realisation that the future of the South African province lies in some form of international community. We realised that Africa itself gives life – our Sisters from Tanzania and India are themselves becoming missionaries! Our hope is that vocations will be awakened also in Malawi and other African countries.

We met the Archbishop of Cape Town, Stephen Brislin, who is currently President of the Episcopal Conference of South Africa. He presented us with a history of the country, and the consequences of apartheid which are still very noticeable in society today. He expanded on the call of the Catholic Church in this complex and complicated situation, which still needs healing and reconciliation. Despite this, he emphasized, we are called to continue to be faithful witnesses of Christ's Gospel, and to look to the future with hope.

We are strengthened by this rich new experience of an historic first meeting in South Africa. We want to undertake new challenges with courage and hope, and we open ourselves to the new breath of God's Spirit.



We also discovered the beauty of this country. Every day from the windows of our house, we admired the top of Table Mountain, and on Sunday morning our group travelled to the Cape of Good Hope, where the Indian Ocean meets the Atlantic Ocean. We admired the wonders of nature, praising the greatness and power of the Creator.

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