



# Archbishop Peter Chong's December 2017 Newsletter

December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Dear Brother Priests, Religious and Parishioners,

## *CHRISTMAS MESSAGE*

Christmas and Care for Mother Earth



What does the birth of Jesus mean for us today in a time when our mother earth is groaning with pain because of the way we have abused her?

One of the rituals related to the birthing of a child is the burying of the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord connects the foetus to the mother's placenta, bringing the child nourishment. The umbilical cord also carries great, symbolic meaning. Throughout history, all over the world, rituals have accompanied the disposal of the umbilical cord after it falls from the baby's body.

Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, a mother buries the umbilical cord at the foot of a young tree, the more fruitful, the better. The chosen palm tree, banana, or breadfruit, will become the child's tree, and

Igbo beliefs hold that it will then give as many fruits as the child has successes throughout his life. It is also a way to bind the child to the earth, and to that special place in his community.

In some parts of Mexico, the umbilical cord is also buried at the foot of a tree as a way to attach the child to his/her village and to the earth. Likewise, Native Americans of several tribes would bury the umbilical cord inside the Sacred Four Corners of their land.

In the *Itaukei* (indigenous Fijian) culture the umbilical cord is buried with a fruit tree. In some *Itaukei* tribes, the female umbilical cord is thrown into the sea while a male's umbilical cord is buried with a fruit tree. Elders would make this remark when a child is too active: "It looks like this kid's umbilical cord was not buried." The ritual communicates how life is transferred from the biological mother to mother earth. After birth, the child will be sustained by mother earth.

The burying of the umbilical cord symbolizes the connectedness of human life to the source of life, that is, our biological mother and mother earth.

If Jesus were born of an *Itaukei* woman, his umbilical cord would have been buried with a coconut. The burying of the umbilical cord reminds us that we draw life from our biological mother as well as from our mother earth. The ritual tells us that we are part of the earth and creation.

The early Christian writers located Jesus in broader context of human history and creation. Mathew's gospel locates Jesus back to Abraham, father of the Hebrew people. Luke views the life of Jesus in the background human history beginning with Adam. John locates the origins of Jesus the Christ back into the mystery of God: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God... and the Word was made flesh." St Paul believes that Jesus Christ has to do with the mystery of creation. Jesus Christ the Word made flesh was with God and through him all things came to be. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the "one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are and through whom we exist. (1Cor 8:6)

The Gospels and St Paul remind us that Jesus' birth and life is not limited to the stable at Bethlehem, but that he is present in all of creation. Therefore, Christmas is not only a time to reflect on the Jesus born in Bethlehem but also to see Jesus present in the whole of creation. Creation is filled with the presence God.

May Christmas Season be a time of re-weaving our relationships with God, families and with mother earth. Have a blessed and peaceful Christmas.

## **NEWS & UPDATES**

### **CURIA NEWS**

The Archdiocese of Suva continues to make good progress in her mission to establish the kingdom of God. Our diocesan commissions are progressively working towards their strategic plans. Recently I appointed Fr. Rogasiano Raikivi as the Vicar for the Youth Commission and Fr. Ioane Vodosiro to be Vicar for the Catechetical Commission. All diocesan commissions now have a Vicar. The Vicars are the bishop's representatives in the commissions and they will help coordinate the commissions' strategic plans and diocesan directives. The other vicars are:

Fr. Frank Hoare, Vicar for the Evangelization Commission,

Fr. Timoci Kolodisi, Vicar for the Liturgy Commission,

Fr. Sulio Turagakacivi, Vicar for the Family Commission,

Fr Josefa Tuimavule, Vicar for Justice and Development Commission.

The Vicars for the regions are:

Fr. Cecil Williams Vicar for the Central Eastern,

Fr. Emiliano Lasaqa Vicar for the West,

Fr. Mateo Waqa Vicar for the North.

Our Archdiocese Pastoral Council is also making good progress. The diocesan Commissions submit their reports to the Pastoral Council. The Pastoral Council will address the long and short-term pastoral plans of the Archdiocese.

The Finance Council is currently working on a few capital projects, namely the properties at Ellery and Hercules Street, Varani Street, and Loa Street. We will also work on other properties in Ba, Wailekutu, Villa Maria. We have a number of unused land in the rural areas. In September, we formed a farm committee in the Northern Region to plan farming projects. They have already planted 2000 *yaqona* plants in Nakayaga land in Bua and their target is to add 2000 every year. We also began sandalwood farming in the Ashram with about 600 plants. We encourage parishes with land to invest creatively. Meanwhile our Finance Officer Mr. David Veremo and Accounts Clerk Andrea Manueli have updated our accounts from 2009 and we will present you with an audited financial report by end of 2017.

The Archdiocese Finance and Administration Office through David Veremo (Finance Officer) conducted a training for parish book-keepers on December 5-6 at St Joseph Secondary School Hall. Our plan is to eventually establish a standard financial management procedure in the Archdiocese. From 2018 the Archdiocese Office requests that all parishes and diocesan centers submit a monthly finance report and an annual audited finance report.

## **DIOCESAN SYNOD**

The Synod preparations are progressing according to plans. We are currently carrying out the consultative phase. We have sent out survey questionnaires, carried out focus groups discussions and posted survey questionnaire through Facebook. From the survey, we will have a rough idea of our peoples' aspirations, hopes and expectations of the Church. The synod data will provide the agenda for the synod meeting. On February 17<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Synod Preparatory Committee will meet to compose the synod theme, prayer and song. The Synod will be launched on Pentecost Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2018. The Synod meeting will be held on June 3-9, 2019. During the Synodal Year there will be renewal programs for various groups in the diocese. The Synodal year will be closed with Mass on Pentecost Sunday 2019.

### **Synod Survey**

I appeal to parish priests to help parishioners fill the survey forms and send them to the office as soon as possible. The survey closes on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2018. The Survey Questions is your opportunity to tell me

about your thoughts, suggestions, aspirations and hopes about the Catholic Church in Fiji. Your voice is important to the success of the synod and the future of the Church.

### **ST DON BOSCO PARISH**



Congratulations! We have a new parish – St Don Bosco Parish in the Makoi, Laqere and Wainibuku area. We thank the Selasian Congregation for taking up this mission. Don Bosco parish was formerly the Area 4 of Our Lady of Fatima Parish which has over 1,000 Catholics. The inauguration of St. Don Bosco parish was held on November 19, 2017. The Parish will include a Youth Center, Church and Secondary School. Fr. Mikaele Leilua was also installed as the pastor of Don Bosco parish.

### **CATECHISTS**

I congratulate the Catechists for their successful Tri-annual meeting. The Catechists' seminar included presentations on Reading the Signs of the Times in Fiji's Political History, Catholic Social Teaching Caring for the Vanua and Indigenous Cosmology. The catechists also carried out a SWOT analysis of their ministry to redefine their mission. The catechist created history raising \$93,618.80 in their soli.

The St. Thomas Aquinas Staff and I are currently reviewing the Catechist Training curriculum. We plan to have more courses using the many resource personnel we have around in Suva. I have appointed Catechist Beni Waqaniyalo as Course Director. Fr. Timoci Kolodisi whom I have appointed as pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish will continue to be the Director of the Catechist Center.

### **CATHOLIC TEACHERS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COURSE**

Thirty-seven catholic teachers attended the Religious Education Course on November 27-December 01 at the Pacific Regional Seminary. The course objective was to provide Catholic teachers who did not attend Corpus Christi College the fundamentals of the Catholic Faith so they can teach Religious Education. Course presenters were: Fr. Jim Hoe, Fr. Frank Hoare, Fr. Timoci Kolodisi, Fr. George Ting and

Archbishop Peter Chong. The teachers were presented a Religious Education Certificate at the end of the course.

## PARISH APPOINTMENTS & ORDINATIONS

We congratulate Fr. Patrick Visanti of the Columban Fathers who was ordained to the priesthood on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Diaconate Ordination** is scheduled for February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The Archdiocese has two candidates for the diaconate: Edward Vakatora and Semi Ulunasobu. I ask the Congregations that have candidates for the diaconate to please inform me. The congregations are also responsible for the celebration of the Rite of Candidacy to the Priesthood.

**New Parish Appointments:** I congratulate and thank the following priests for accepting their new appointments:

- Fr. Luke Nalau, Pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish Vatukoula
- Fr. Petero Nimilote, temporarily assigned as Come and See Director and Navesi Chaplain while awaiting further studies.
- Fr. Mateo Waqa, Pastor of St. Andrew's Parish Savarekareka
- Fr. Timoci Kolidisi, Pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish Nadera
- Fr. Tomasi Selesitino, Parochial Vicar Our Lady of Hope Parish Vanuakula
- Fr. Vio Drou, Parochial Vicar St Joseph the Worker Parish Tamavua
- Fr. Tito Muavesi sm, Parish Administrator Holy Eucharist Parish Laucala Bay
- Fr. Fabiano Dakai sm, Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Levuka
- Fr. Petero Tagidrau sm, temporary assignment St Mary's Parish Nadi

As the year 2017 comes to an end I take this time to sincerely thank you all for the good work you are doing for God's people. I wish you all a blessed and peaceful Christmas and prosperous New Year.



May God Bless You.

+ Archbishop Peter Loy Chong