



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LAE

Office of the Bishop

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To:

ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS
SUPERIORS OF CATHOLIC CONGREGATIONS IN POLAND
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

I am Bishop Rozario Menezes, greetings you and wishing you good health and benediction in the Lord. Happy New Year 2025.

Short history of the Catholic Diocese of Lae

The First attempt of the Catholic Church to open a “Mission” in the Morobe province, PNG was made on May 1848 by the Marist Fathers headed by Bishop Colomb. The Mission was unsuccessful. Bishop Colomb and Fr. Villien died on Umboi Island. The two remaining missionaries left the island without a single convert.

It was not until in 1935 that the Catholic Church returned to the Siassi Islands, this time through some catechists (converts), who were trained in Rabaul and returned to their villages to establish the Catholic Church at the islands. Today, there are vibrant Christian Communities in the Siassi Islands.

The history of the Catholic Church in the mainland of Morobe goes back to the time after the gold rush in Wau and Bulolo in 1927. Missionaries of the Divine Word Society (SVD) came periodically by air from their headquarters in Alexishafen near Madang for pastoral care of the Catholics, employees of the Australian Administration and the private sector, gold miners and their workers who were in the majority contract workers from the Catholic Sepik Region. Prior to and during World War II, the SVD Fathers Kirschbaum and John Glover, in that order, resided at Wau and looked after the Catholic population till 1956. Earlier in 1950, a Catholic Church was built in Wau. This was the first permanent Catholic Church building in the Morobe Province, and thus, is the oldest Church building in the present Diocese of Lae.

In 1946, Fr. Leo Arkfeld, SVD was named as first pastor of Lae, which had supplanted Salamaua as the main coastal center. When Fr. Arkfeld was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Central New Guinea in 1948, he was succeeded by Fr. Bachus, SVD. The SVD Fathers looked after Lae until in 1957 when the Australian Passionists Fathers took over.

In 1960, the first four Marianhill Missionaries—Fr. Henry van Lieshout, Fr. Anthony Mulderink, Fr. Gerard Hafmans and Fr. Bert Kempkes—appeared in the scene to take over the work from the Passionists Fathers when the Vicariate Apostolic of Lae with its own jurisdiction was erected by decree of Pope John XXIII on 18th June 1959. At that time there were approximately 1,750 Catholics of about 200,000 inhabitants of Morobe Province.

Lae had been a Vicariate for seven years without a resident bishop. The Vicar Apostolic of Goroka, Bernard Schillings, SVD was its first overseer then. It was not until **November 15, 1966**, that the Vicariate of Lae was elevated to a diocese and on the same day

Pope Paul VI appointed Fr. Henry van Lieshout, CMM as the first bishop of the newly erected diocese. Since then, Late Bishop Henry Shepherded the Diocese until his retirement in 2006 at the age of 75 after having been a Bishop for 40 years. Sadly though, retired-bishop Henry van Lieshout, CMM, DD, GCL, unexpectedly passed away on December 24, 2009. For nearly half a century Late Bishop Henry toiled tirelessly with all his co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord to bring the Diocese to where it is today.

In 2006, Fr. Christian Blouin, CMM was appointed Bishop to succeed Late Bishop Henry and was ordained Bishop as well as installed to his Episcopal chair on May 5, 2007.

On October 10, 2018 Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Christian Blouin CMM and appointed Most Rev. Rozario Menezes SMM (Montfort Missionary from India) as the third Bishop of Lae diocese. His episcopal ordination was held on December 15, 2018 in Lae.

During the past 56 years, the Diocese of Lae has grown from modest beginnings with less than 2,000 Catholics to more than 55,000 at present. Fifty years ago, it only had a handful of permanent church buildings; a few parishes and one or two schools. Fifty years on, the many quality church buildings, parishes, schools, a variety of communities, lay movements, associations, and in more recent years, the establishment of Catholic FM 103.7, the radio station of the Diocese of Lae, the Mercy Centre (health center) at Omili, a Diocesan Hall, and the newly established sub-parish at the Back road, and a brand new chancery building, which has office spaces for the diocesan staff, an office for the Bishop, radio station and three guests rooms, offer an eloquent picture of the activities of 56 years in the making of a Diocese that has come a long and arduous way in growing up to its present state.

For half a century, the Diocese of Lae has benefitted much from the hard working Marianhill Missionaries, CPS and FMI Sisters, MSC Fathers and Brothers, MJ priests, Rosary sisters, Diocesan priests, Lay Missionaries and Volunteer Workers from different nationalities who came to share their faith, skills and personalities in the growth and development of the Catholic Church in Morobe Province: Dutch, Australians, Canadians, Germans, Americans, Polish, Filipinos, New Zealanders, Zambians, South Africans, Panamanians, Zimbabweans, Vietnamese, Maltese, French, Japanese, Indians, Irish, and Papua New Guineans.

At present, our pastoral agents are composed of 4 diocesan priests, 4 Marianhill Missionaries, 1 Institute Volantes Dei, 1 Heralds of Good News, 1 Montfort Missionary 2 Missionaries of Compassion, 2 Missionaries of Divine Vocations, 2 Fidei Donum and 4 Sacred Heart Brothers. We have five religious' congregations of sisters working in the Diocese: CPS (with 5 Members) Rosary sisters (with 3 members), and Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa (with four members)

Our few work force is spread all over the Province of Morobe. We are in the highlands of Bulolo, Wau and Menyamya. We are shepherding our people in the Siasi Islands and the Markham Valley. Majority are working in the City of Lae.

In our work of evangelization, the Diocese is committed to the **education** of our people. We have 13 elementary schools, 10 primary schools, two adult literacy schools and 4 TVET schools. We have also **health** services: 1 Health Center, 5 Aid Post, and 2 HIV/AIDS VCCT Centers.

We are short of missionaries, having 6 parishes without resident priests, looked after by catechist and visited by priests from nearby parishes or visiting priests from the town parishes.

We request the Archbishops, Bishops and Leaders of Religious Congregations to send missionaries who have zeal to be a missionary in PNG.

Looking forward for a positive response for my request.

I take this opportunity to wish each one of you Happy and prosperous new year 2025, may this be a year of Hope for all of you.

Sincerely yours,

+ Rozario Menezes s.m.m
Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Lae