

Golden Jubilee celebration

Congratulations Fr. John McKenna op

- Joseph Lalaubatu, Diocese of Gizo

Catholic Diocese of Gizo together with the Dominican Friars and Sisters, celebrated the occasion of the Priesthood Golden Jubilee of Fr. John McKenna OP on Saturday 27th September, 2008 at Gizo. More than 300 people attended the celebration which coincides with his farewell and thanksgiving mass as he leaves to return to his home country Australia, after serving the Diocese of Gizo for forty (40) years.



The lively Liturgy was led by the Dominican community of Loga, Nusabaruka Kiribati community and the parishioners of Gizo. In his homily, Fr. McKenna attributed his source of strength over the years to his guardian angels; his model saints John Messiahs & Blessed Tekawita and the Children of the Parishes he served in the Diocese. He further added that, the simplicity of welcoming, listening and correcting the children helped him to see the priestly life of Jesus Christ in his life as a Priest.

Fr. John McKenna was always available for confessions on Sundays before Mass and visited the sick and old, bringing the Holy Communion after mass. He recommends this practice to all our young Priests.

Fr. Simon Suvenava OP- the Vicar General of the Diocese concelebrated the Mass with Fr. McKenna OP. Bishop Luciano Capelli was not able to attend but sends his congratulatory messages and prayers.

The day's celebration was highlighted with the presentation of the Jubilee cake by Titiana Camp youth and followed by feasting, speeches and entertainments.

He is aware that Solomon Islands have become his home and the people with whom he has lived and worked with are very much members of his Solomon family. As he returns to his home country of Australia with mixed feelings of sadness at leaving his family and contentment that the Church he leaves behind are truly a people of deep committed Christian faith.

He is grateful for the support given to him, especially those with whom he worked in collaboration, the priests, religious, community catechists and the Diocesan Staff who provided for the pastoral needs of the people of the Diocese of Gizo, where he spent 40 years as a missionary. He thanked everybody and concluded by saying; My Prayer for you is where my heart is!

A brief biography of Fr. John McKenna OP.

John McKenna was born in Camberwell, Victoria, a suburb of Melbourne, Australia on 9th September 1932. He was educated by the Dominican Sisters and Christian Brothers for his primary and secondary education. .

He entered the Dominican Order as a co-operate brother in 1949 and was given the name; Brother John Messiahs. After serving the Order as a co-operate brother for almost four years, he decided to study for the priesthood.

Fr. John McKenna studied for the Priesthood in Melbourne and later in Sydney. He was ordained a priest in December 1958. After his ordination, he served at Blackfriars Schools in South Australia as well as in Canberra as an assistant Parish Priest.

Following a two years in Canberra, Fr. John McKenna was appointed to the Solomon Islands Dominican Mission, arriving in March 1968 and was assistant Parish Priest to Fr. Cyril O'Grady OP (now retired Bishop Bernard) at Nila Parish, Shortlands.

In January 1969 he was posted to Sirovanga as the Parish Priest. However, in August the same year, he was appointed Parish Priest of Wagina, where he served for twenty-three (23) years. This was his real life at work and the joy of his heart.

He returned to Nila as a Parish Priest in 1991 and taught at St. Anne's Vocational school. In 1993 he stationed at Moli and was given the Pastoral responsibility for all the Kiribati communities in the Diocese. He was a Chaplain of St. Dominic's Rural Training Centre - Vanga in 1996 and returned again to Wagina in 1997.

At the great jubilee year of 2000 Fr. John McKenna due to a hearing problem decided to retire from Parish responsibilities but made himself available at all times and assisted the Diocese as he was stationed at Loga. He continued to serve his Dominican Friars community and the Diocese since then.