

# Time passes in no time

**Fr. Gerard Bruns sm, celebrates 50 years of Priesthood**

- Carol Labbad, Catholic Communications Solomons

**Looking back at Fr. Gerard's past, this strong, outspoken and 'straight down-the-line' man has been through and achieved so much. In his "short" 50 years of service, Fr. Gerard says "time is gone in no time, you keep breathing and time goes whether you decide to do something or not". His decision was clearly to do something and he did just that.**



## **Who is Fr. Gerard?**

Originally from the Netherlands, Fr. Gerard Bruns sm, now fondly called Gerry, came to the Solomon Islands in 1958 where he was ordained that year on September 28<sup>th</sup>. Since then, he has taught in a number of schools around the Solomon Islands, helped to rebuild homes and schools after a cyclone, translated the bible into the East Malaitan language of Kahua, travelled the world and even written a dictionary in the Kahua language. Today he resides in the Tanagai Marist house as he eagerly awaits his next project.

*It is clear that this self confessed perfectionist and "odd ball" has been through many struggles that life has thrown at him. From a paralysing back injury to rebuilding a town after a devastating cyclone, Fr. Gerry believes that "...in life you will be faced by hurdles, if you want to get ahead, you need to jump over these hurdles...". His strong fighting spirit has ensured that he has been able to overcome these difficult times with confidence and success.*

## **His life so far...**

*Fr. Gerry's early intentions in life were not to become a priest. In fact, in 1945, just after the war, Fr. Gerry was keen to become a missionary as a Social Worker. He went to Belgium and studied Sociology, Media and Modern Philosophy. He then completed his Minor and Major studies in the Seminary in the Netherlands and in 1958 came to the Solomon Islands where he was ordained as a Marist priest. After his ordination, Fr. Gerry worked at a school in Makira teaching English and Arithmetic to teenagers, although he had never been trained as a teacher before. He continued teaching in various schools such as Manivovo School and Rokera Station School in South Malaita.*

*In 1965 he became parish priest at Wanoni Bay and later took a well deserved break for 6 months and travelled to the USA for a spiritual renewal. He then returned to teaching again and faced more struggles such as the unfortunate cyclone in Manivovo which destroyed most of the area. Fr. Gerry refused to leave and remained to help the locals rebuild. Then in 1974, he felt the need to work more extensively with young adults. So Fr. Gerry started Wanoni Bay Resource Centre where he mainly taught Integral Development.*

*From 1998 to more recently, Fr. Gerry worked in Nana Rural Training Centre in Manivovo. In this all girls school he taught Integral Human Development for about 10 years. Fr. Gerry can now be found at the Tanagai Marist house*

where the Lord's plan for him here will soon be revealed.

### **Most interesting place he's been?**

Fr. Gerry is not into showy deeds especially when it comes to religious practices. So when asked about the most interesting place he's ever been, he answers easily – "It's a place called Taizé, located in France. "Taizé is the most prayerful place I have been to. Its people are financially poor but rich in religion...it is a place where a sea of interdenominational youths gather to live and pray".

### **Who has influenced him most throughout his life so far?**

Fr. Gerry answers this question quite easily with the name of his recently deceased dear friend, Fr. Michael Aike from Makira in Auki. The two shared so much together, both difficult times and fond moments. Their 10 year friendship taught Fr. Gerry a lot about himself and gave him an insight into the people of the Solomon Islands. The death of his "great friend" is felt deeply today as there is a clear void in Fr. Gerry's life.

### **What does he do when faced with difficult times?**

Fr. Gerry tackles uncontrollable difficulties with patience. If you cannot jump over the hurdle you must exercise patience. "If you cannot control or change something, why worry about it...otherwise you'll go mad..."

### **How does he see the future of the Solomon Islands?**

Fr. Gerry doesn't hide the fact that he is worried about the future of the Solomon Islands. Issues such as the financial crisis, political instability and corruption, increase in population and shortage of land are all contributing to a bleak future. He even predicts that there will be ethnic tension even worse than before. Fr. Gerry claims that "...everything may appear calm on the outside but nothing has changed in the hearts of the people...family life is breaking down everywhere." He also fears the impacts that a State Government may have. "There is a great danger where we risk State against State conflict where there is no feeling of unity as a country." Fr. Gerry believes that the solution lies in the hands of the Politicians. "...corruption must stop and Politicians need to solve land ownership issues as they are the root of the problems."

### **How does he view himself?**

Fr. Gerry admits he is a non-traditionalist who speaks his mind which sometimes scares people. He feels that it is important to "...talk straight, not in circles, you must speak your mind no matter what people may think. It is important to be yourself".

### **In conclusion....**

Fr. Gerry is certainly one of a kind and was an absolute pleasure to chat with. His long career has been filled with interesting, humorous, tough and sometimes mischievous moments and his stories were a delight to listen to. We wish Fr. Gerry all the best in the next chapter of his career in Tanagai and eagerly await on the plans that the Lord has in store for him. Congratulations on 50 years of priesthood Fr. Gerry!