

MELANESIA TRIP REPORT

26 May – 7 June 2009

Archbishop Michael G. Peers



First, I must apologize for the lateness of this report. The weeks since my return have been extremely busy - preparing and delivering an address at Trinity College, spending my week as confessor at SSJE Cambridge and writing a 500-word sermon in French to be delivered on Radio Canada TV the first Sunday in July at Sorel. But that is done and I return to my notes from

Photo 1- main street, Honiara

Melanesia.

Apart from a minor hiccup at Pearson when my checked luggage was refused a label because I didn't have an Australian visa (\$25 fixed that), the travel all happened as it should, though the 15-hour haul from Vancouver to Sydney seemed interminable. Australian customs at Sydney and transfer to the domestic terminal went smoothly and I arrived in Brisbane with half a day (1pm to 1am) to spend. There is no left luggage service in any Australian airport and I found that, while I appreciated the motel near the Brisbane as a place to store luggage, I couldn't actually sleep. So I went into downtown Brisbane (which I know reasonably well) and spent time revisiting the Queen Street Mall, the cathedral and other central places. I had to be at the airport at 10pm for the flight to Honiara. That flight was uneventful, with a number of people I recognized (David Bindon from Auckland and Willie Pwaisiho from Chester).

Friday, May 29. COM people were at the airport to meet us all, including Terry Brown, and we returned to the house he has been inhabiting for the last months. It is located among diocesan housing just east of Bishop's Dale, the Archbishop's residence. It is a three-bedroom house with a large living room which holds Terry's remarkable library, still large though he disposed of half his books on leaving Auki. The kitchen and bathroom are rather decrepit and dependent on the Honiara water system – unreliable and non-potable. Fortunately, there is a very fine rain water barrel which

gathers rain from the roofs of two houses, his and the adjoining diocesan house. The house will be tenanted by the archbishop's secretary as of August 1, so Terry has moved July 1 to a much better place up the hill. It is newer (about five years old), quieter, up the hill somewhat closer to the centre of Honiara, and the



Photo 2- + Terry's temp housing

appliances actually function. The agreement with the COM provides him with housing through the remaining four+ years of his contract to establish the provincial archives.

The day was largely filled with domestic chores – shopping at the market (larger and pricier than Auki – Terry has a deal with a Malaitan who comes to Honiara by ferry once a week to supply him with Malaita produce as well) after the boys of the house had gone to school. I began the process of paying Terry the \$750CN that I had received for my upkeep – at that point the exchange rate was exactly \$3CN=\$20SI, so it was a matter of withdrawing \$5,000SI (over several days as \$3,000 was the daily limit and I also needed some money for myself, so it took several withdrawals to get that completed). An accounting is attached to the report.

Terry and I had lunch at a Chinese restaurant, and waited a long time for a taxi which had brought us into town. After that we just used the little private enterprise buses (SI\$3 each way, into town or back).

The remainder of the day was spent catching up in sleep and distributing things I had been commissioned to provide for the household (e.g., computer, good English dictionary, the classiest and most well-constructed tin opener I have ever bought) and enjoying Terry's splendid local cooking.

Saturday, May 30. This day was spent at the house – every diocesan vehicle (Terry has no vehicle of his own) was busy so there was no travelling about. Much of the day was spent trying to figure out the camera by correlating the knowledge of Derrick Au, one of the boys in the house, who knows how to make a camera function, with the (to me) nearly incomprehensible instructions in the manual.



Photo 3- preparing for the feast

The dean's house was the hub of a great deal of preparation for the dinner the next night at Bishop's Dale. The deanery by the cathedral is being rebuilt, so the Dean (Sam Ata) has been living in a diocesan house next door to Terry. He has been appointed a member of the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Province (the cathedral is a provincial cathedral) decided that he should resign. (They appointed a new dean June 7.)

Dinner preparations involved many women grating coconut, preparing yam, taro, sweet potato, and greens, and men preparing

a small fire for burning the hair off a pig who, when I passed, was lying in a pit, trussed to a pole and sounding quite unhappy about its immediate (brief) future. More information about the dinner in tomorrow's report.

Sunday, May 31. – Pentecost. The COM bus taking us to the cathedral arrived at 6am and we gathered others on the route. Non-Melanesians were having difficulty being ready to leave at such an hour. The cathedral was already full and the land around was filling up. The eventual attendance was in the neighbourhood of 4,000 (the chair of the New Zealand



Photo 4- receiving the Primatial Cross

Melanesian Mission Board, a great friend of Sir Ellison, commented that at Ellison's installation there were 5,000 people present). The official out-of-country episcopal guests were seated close to the altar along with the heads of other churches in the Solomons (more on that later). Archbishop Jabez Bryce was unable to represent Aotearoa New Zealand Polynesia, so their representative was the Maori Bishop in Rotorua; the Church of England was represented by an Assistant Bishop of Chester, Willie Pwaisiho (a Melanesian living in England). There were staff members of New Zealand and Australian mission boards, some lay, some clerical, as well as the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn.

The service was long and replete with classic Melanesian ceremony – welcoming warrior party for the Archbishop as he entered the cathedral, gospel and offertory processions in the classic “canoe” style – as well as a couple of dozen formal greetings to the Archbishop once he had been installed in the two chairs (one the chair of the Bishop of Central Melanesia, one the chair of the Archbishop of Melanesia) from dioceses, religious orders, heads of other churches, overseas guests, officers of governments of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, etc.



The Most Reverend David Vunagi, Primate, Anglican Church of Melanesia

Photo Credit: Melanesian Messenger

In my greeting on behalf of Archbishop Hiltz I pointed out that Archbishop Vunagi was the first graduate of a Canadian theological college to be installed as Archbishop and Primate of a Province other than Canada. That information was news to most people present, but the Archbishop told me later that he was grateful that I had called attention to it. (I was lucky the installation took place when it did – a week or two later a graduate of Wycliffe became Primate of Kenya!). The only heads

of churches present were the Roman Catholic archbishop and the head of the “Anglican Orthodox” (if I heard correctly) church. He was seated next to me wearing rochet, black chimere and scarf, never acknowledged my presence. He turns out to be the deposed bishop of Ysabel (Sam Carrière and I stayed in his house in 2001!) who has founded his own church – one parish made up of his own “wontoks”. He didn’t come forward with the rest of us to receive Communion, but a bit later some of the clergy administering in the sanctuary brought the sacrament to him. (More on this subject in Friday’s report.)

All of the invited guests (easily 100), local and overseas, church and state, were invited to breakfast at St Nicholas School, not far from the cathedral, preceded by

entertainment by students and others (including Polynesian music and dancing – the old Hawaiian potboiler “Aloha Oe” that I remember from my youth). I had good conversation with a clerical member of the New Zealand Board of Mission from Wellington and the ABM officer from the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Their respective boards have strong manifestations in their dioceses (much as PWRDF has had in

some Canadian dioceses) which helps a great deal with programs of mission education, and it was interesting to hear

of their work. The breakfast did not end until well after noon; we then went by bus back to the cathedral grounds where tents had been set to serve a feast to the congregation.



Photo 5- David & Mary Vunagi with Governor General at breakfast



Photo 6- the Southern Cross

I spent some time in conversation at lunch time with the chair of the NZ Melanesian Mission Board (whom I had met before in 2001 in Auckland – we share a common opinion of George Carey whose staff had required modifications to the “Southern Cross” costing \$40,000 in advance of a visit which George cancelled, presumably at the behest of the Foreign Office, but against the specific advice of the Primates of Melanesia and New Zealand). I hope he will come to know Archbishop Vunagi, as he is at present such a fan of Sir Ellison, and Ellison has made very public objections, reported in the press, about the

fact that he was not allowed a further extension to the age requirement while an extension has made to enable David Vunagi to accept election (he will be 60, the normal retirement age, in under two years). He was not overtly hostile in his comments, but made it clear that he is watching closely lest there be too much change.

After lunch (well into the afternoon) there were more formal greetings and speeches, and even though we were under a canvas shelter, Terry and I were wilting, so we slipped away and took a taxi home for a siesta.

The dinner at Bishop’s Dale was another grand occasion – all the splendid food prepared the day before, and even beer and wine (not something I had experienced at an official church meal in the Solomons) and lots of speeches. It was also the occasion when formal greetings were presented (not read aloud) and gifts presented, and I gave the Archbishop the letter and gift from the Primate (more on Friday). The Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands made a good speech stressing the areas of education and health as places where cooperation with the churches (especially the COM) was crucial. I had difficulty hearing the deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu but it sounded positive. The Archbishop’s speech was significant in a couple of ways. He responded positively to the overtures of the SI PM and then continued by stating his hope that the efforts of the COM and the government in the founding of a university in Honiara would begin to bear fruit. (Ellison had been lukewarm about the project). The COM is working towards moving Bishop Patteson Theological College from Kohimarama to the land they have already purchased outside Honiara, not that far from the Sisters of the Church at TNK. And he referred to their hope that education and medicine would not be far behind. Obviously, given the state of the economy and a host of other problems, major government projects may be slow in coming (their main overseas partner – one sees the flag everywhere – is Taiwan, a choice that may be problematic in the time ahead). But it was a clear signal on that front. At one point there was a possibility that Terry might have a role in the university project, but that seems unlikely now – the archives will be demanding enough.

At one point in the evening I had a conversation with Bishop Sam Sahu, formerly Mission Secretary, now Bishop of Malaita, but I didn’t get a chance to ask about the rumpus on Malaita where some rather obstreperous Muslims had been causing trouble in some villages, provoking a strong response from Sam and the RC bishop of Malaita. That had been in the papers some weeks before this event, I gather.

Fortunately, I was staying at Terry’s house, not many metres from this event, so we could get home easily.

Monday 1 June. In the morning I met briefly with Doreen Ata (wife of Dean Sam Ata) who has become the chair of the board of the Christian Care Centre in succession to Terry, who had a conflict of interest because he was also the Visitor to the Sisters of the Church. The Centre is the only refuge in the country for women and children suffering domestic abuse at the hands of husbands and fathers. It is jointly run by the Sisters of the Church and the Melanesian Sisters, a somewhat parallel community to the Melanesian Brotherhood in that members do not take life vows but renew their vows (or not) after a certain period of time (three years I believe). The direction of the Centre had been in the hands of a CSC sister who had been very difficult and not an appropriate person in a position of such sensitivity – relations with the two communities, the resident women and children, the wider community had been very unnecessarily complicated.

The interview with Doreen was very heartening – she has clearly dealt with a number of issues about leadership and future direction, and has a clear view of the next steps. (see Thursday).

The day was relatively quiet. In the morning Terry and I discussed archival issues. He was interested in the book that I had brought – volume iv of “The Anglican Episcopate in Canada” – not only because he knew so many of the people in the book, but also because of some of the archival principles that I had (a) inherited from previous volumes and (b) altered. We looked at the paper he had presented in New Zealand some weeks before at the bicentenary of the birth of Bishop George Selwyn. Terry had researched the visits of Bishop Selwyn to Canada and the USA in the 1870’s by which time he was Bishop of Lichfield. I had learned the day before from one of New Zealand guests at the installation that the paper had been well received (although they had made him reduce its length very considerably).

More importantly, I learned about the progress being made in his task of establishing the provincial archives for Melanesia. He has spent the first year working in the National Archives where a certain portion of the material is already lodged and will move on to more demanding job of sorting the archival material at the COM offices stored in less ideal circumstances (the National Archives are air conditioned; the COM offices, at least where the material is stored, are not). He has made a contact with a researcher in Melbourne who is working on the history of the decolonisation of Melanesia - she recognizes that the churches have been a major force in all that, but needs the ecclesiastical and theological background to it all, and is willing to pay for it.

In the afternoon we went with a couple of the students in the household to a football (soccer) game. A fun event, especially as the winning team was the one the boys (and, consequently, I) were rooting for.

In the evening we went out to dinner. I had been introduced on Sunday to an Australian woman, Helen Barrett, a nurse who had worked in various parts of the Solomons from the 1940’s to the 1990’s. A retired MP and his wife organized a dinner to honour her. She had worked first in Ysabel and later in Malaita, developing and using that powerful force, the Mothers’ Union, and had produced major change everywhere she went. She is retired (at 89 she deserves to be) and was accompanied by Rose Elu, a Torres Island woman, also a formidable character and MU champion. My problem is that the details of the places and people they were talking about were beyond my experience of the Solomons; but what I can communicate is the profound impression Helen had made decades ago on everyone present (a dozen people) and for countless people in Ysabel and Malaita.

Tuesday, 2 June. The day began with a lengthy interview with James Ligo, Bishop of Vanuatu and New Caledonia. The Diocese has recently begun work in New Caledonia, part of “France Outre-Mer” (like Tahiti, Martinique, St Pierre et Miquelon – officially part of France with deputies, senators, etc., but de facto colonies), among Vanuatu folk who have moved there to find employment. Vanuatu has two official languages, English and French, as well as pijin and bislama (a French-based créole), reflecting its history as the condominium of New Hebrides. New Caledonia functions in French.

Regular, though not every Sunday, worship has begun in Nouméa, the capital, and the attendance is growing. Consequently, there is a need for a translation into French of the Melanesian Prayer Book. The Bishop and I discussed in detail the question of what priority would be given to the various parts of the Prayer Book and also to questions of style. His list of priorities includes almost everything in the book (e.g., Giving Thanks after Childbirth, not something that would have occurred to me) although a number of Litanies (Rogation, for Missions to the Heathen) would be dispensable in the initial go-round. The book includes a hymnal of 107 songs – we did not discuss that subject at all.

I had been warned by Andrea before I left that budget for a project like this would be minimal, so I was sparing in terms of financial commitments. Bishop Ligo has access to some assistance within the government of Vanuatu – as a bilingual country it has an internal translation service – and he is prepared to make inquiries there. He is cautiously optimistic about the amount to which they would be prepared to help. The caution relates to the size of the translation service; the optimism comes from the fact that this is a ministry to Vanuatu people outside the country.

I had initiated a conversation on this subject at the April meeting of the House of Bishops with Bishop Drainville and am willing to pursue the matter with him. The translators in Quebec diocese have done a lot of work for the Communion around documents, especially for occasions such as Lambeth and ACC meetings, but I have no idea who paid for all that. The prospect of doing something for outreach in the South Pacific could well have some attraction.

The question of style is significant. The Melanesian Prayer Book is not a reproduction of the BCP of the CofE. To give an example, in the Lord’s Prayer “hallowed” becomes “holy”, “kingdom” becomes “rule”, “earth” becomes “world”, “bread” becomes “food”, “sins” becomes “what we do wrong”, “trespass against” becomes “do wrong to”, “deliver” becomes “save”. This would become even more important in the translation of the Psalms – the French translation in the ECUSA Prayer Book is an elegant one but would contain words totally beyond the ken of people for whom French is a language (a second language) of education and communication, but not of poetry.

My own proposal to Bishop James was that I would be prepared to report to Bishop Drainville, that I thought the first priority should go to the Eucharist (with the Collects) and Baptism, then the pastoral offices of Marriage and Burial, but all decisions about Canadian involvement would be in the hands of the appropriate committees of General Synod.

Obviously, if the Canadian church is going to be involved there are staff and committee discussions to consider, and none of that is my business. I think the project is worth proceeding with, especially as there are few provinces with the resources that we may have. One province that may have done some work in the area of French translation is Indian Ocean, most particularly the Diocese of Mauritius. In the 1990’s they did some translating of catechetical work produced in English in South Africa, but whether they have

done liturgical translation I do not know. One idea that might be worth discussing among staff would be some change in the description of the Cuba/Malaita Trust which could broaden the terms to include other areas of the Melanesian church. The theme has been educational work, and I think translation would not go against that original theme. I might also be able to tap some funding for such a proposal.

It was interesting that the Bishop sees this as a ministry to Vanuatu nationals in New Caledonia – he made no reference to work among New Caledonians. I visited New Caledonia in 1991 on a WCC “team visit” before the Canberra assembly. The church situation there is complex – strongly Roman Catholic, for obvious reasons, but also some Protestant work through the London Missionary Society in the 19th century, just as happened in Madagascar. Whether there is a subtext of Anglican “church planting” I do not know – I certainly didn’t hear any.

The rest of Tuesday dealt with household tasks, especially the purchase of food. Terry’s students and visitors eat voraciously. We also arranged with the COM office for the use of a Hilux from Wednesday through Sunday to make the visits outside Honiara. They produced such a vehicle, thereby simplifying my travel arrangements – I simply paid for the petrol. The Hilux was not without problems – its battery only actually functioned approximately one time in five.



Photo 7- the ACM Hilux

Wednesday, 3 June. Terry and I headed to the western part of Guadalcanal for a series of visits, taking with us Eric, a Malaitan, graduate of Airahu in automobile mechanics, who was in Honiara applying for a position with the national police force. We went to the western tip of the island, making five calls.

Bishop Patteson Theological College.



Photo 8- Fr. Ben Seka, Principal, BPTC & MG Peers

The week I was in Melanesia coincided with reading week at BPTC, so there were almost no students in evidence when we arrived in the morning, though we did see some faculty whom I had met at the installation. The principal welcomed us and we had a good conversation. In response to Andrea’s query about money (\$800) sent last year, Fr Seka said that he did not recall receiving it. So we agreed that Terry would make inquiries in the next week – the assumption was that with the changes in staff in the provincial office (especially in the previous months since Sam Sahu had

left for Malaita) there were a number of things undone. Faculty housing, for which that money is intended, remains an issue – The “Canadian” house needs considerable repair.

In response to the question about what are the major issues facing the college, Fr Seka responded that they were water and the relocation. The question of water was one that I heard in a number of places.

The damage done by the January storms destroyed a number of systems by which water is brought from one place to where people are, and Kohimarama is no exception. Their well is poisoned. One response which seems almost universal is the rain barrel – stainless steel, circular, about 2 metres in diameter and 1.5 metres high – into which water is directed from roof surfaces and eavestroughs. We saw one next to a building, awaiting hook-up to the roof water source, identical to the one Terry was using.

The question of the relocation is also an urgent one. The Archbishop's commitment to a new university with the theological college as one of the first priorities was welcome news at BPTC for a number of reasons. For example, the college has received a gift of computers (new! not second hand!) from Brisbane, and while they are welcome as word-processors, etc., the college is a long way from any tower that would provide internet connection. (The distance from these towers also means that telephone connections are poor.) They maintain five or six computers in a room near the COM office in Honiara where people can connect with the Internet for academic purposes whenever they are able to be in the city. Obviously a move to the outskirts of Honiara would enormously increase the resources at the disposal of students and staff. Travel is, at the moment, restored after the devastation of the storms early in the year, but the number that can go into Honiara is limited by the availability of transport.



Photo 9- new library at BPTC

We saw the new library and met the librarian. The building reminded me of a wonderful book store in San Francisco called “A Well-lit Place for Books”. It is large for the number of books, but therefore has good places to study. The librarian seemed rather shy, but she is knowledgeable and committed to the task. She said that the issue of acquisitions, with all the dynamics of small budget and huge numbers of books on offer, was one of her problems. I gather that the possible VIM person from Vancouver has worked in acquisitions, so I hope that appointment may still be a live option. (I remember on my visit in 2001 that organization was the problem – that seems in good shape). As and when BPTC moves, the library building will be an asset for whoever inherits the place.

Melanesian Brotherhood.

We then went to Tabalia. Almost no one from the Brotherhood was there (for a reason which I either never knew or have forgotten). But from the Brothers who met us we learned that Tabalia has rebounded from the storms: they have a borehole, powered by a solar pump, which assures them a good water supply

(their situation, lower down the hill than BPTC, is an asset). They have also made other infrastructure changes to make them less vulnerable to natural disasters.

We saw the graves of the seven murdered brothers. They are all in a row, fenced and cared for, quite awesome as one stands and reflects on all that is symbolized there. I imagine (my own reflection, not tested with anyone else) that they are being prepared as a place of pilgrimage, not in a Lourdes way but for people whose admiration for the Brotherhood is powerful.

With no person in charge present, there was no chance to pursue Andrea's question about projects and grants.

Society of St Francis.

We travelled on to the headquarters of the SSF – at this point I was on new territory; I had been to Kohimarama and Tabalia twice before. Once again we arrived to find almost no one there – the brothers were with the Melanesian sisters helping them to prepare for the Great Conference the next week at which the Archbishop would come and they would elect a new head sister.

The SSF, the Melanesian Sisters and Selwyn College are all located on contiguous property at the far western end of Guadalcanal; the Brothers and the Sisters each occupy property at the top of a high hill, while Selwyn College is on the plain by the ocean. This property has been in the possession of the church since the early 20th century (it was the church printing press), and was bombed by the Japanese in 1942. As with Kohimarama, the location brings certain advantages (privacy, space for farming and farm animals) and certain disadvantages (long trips for supplies, poor telephone connections, no internet). The religious orders have other communities, including houses in Honiara, so their isolation is somewhat mitigated, but some of their buildings are very old (by comparison with the CSC at TNK).

The location of the SSF “mother house” felt very isolated as it is surrounded by the forest with a very steep and very rough access road (fine for our Hilux because we parked it facing downhill and it didn’t need to be pushed).



Photo 11- pets' graveyard at SSF



Photo 10-graves of the Melanesian Brothers

We were given a tour of the premises by the three brothers present. For the SSF, simple accommodations are entirely consistent with the tradition of St Francis. For me, one touching, typically Franciscan, site on the property was the burial site for pets, near the grave of the first Melanesian Franciscan. Their chapel is also simple, in the Franciscan tradition, but very well-maintained and neat.

I gather that the community has a rather high turnover, but this was not a part of their conversation with us.

Melanesian Sisters.



Photo 12-Community of the Sisters of Melanesia

We arrived at the Sisters to find the community in high gear, preparing for the Great Conference of the next week. We had a discussion with the chaplain (a former Melanesian Brother) who felt that the list of nominations for the superior contained good names and was hopeful about the future.

As with the SSF, we had a tour of the property; some of the buildings date from earlier times when the premises had classrooms, others are more recent. The matter of the age of the buildings is serious because the COM is not keen in investing in new buildings on that site.

The sense of isolation is considerably mitigated by the fact that the buildings are all visible from the bottom of the hill (where vehicles park), and the ocean is visible from the top of the hill.

Selwyn College.

This was our last stop on our travels that day, and we had a good conversation with the deputy head master. Selwyn is the most prestigious school in the country with a solid history of quality education (Archbishop Vunagi is a former headmaster). The school suffered considerably from the same storms as struck Kohimarama and Tabalia and has had problems with water, sewage (the terrain is open and absolutely flat) and consequent illness (diarrhea) among the student population who are all boarders.

We had a good discussion with the deputy head about the educational situation in the country and, therefore, for the church schools. Teacher training for the public school system is weak and the system suffers from serious problems - for example, absenteeism among both students and teachers is very high. The government inspectorate of schools has broken down, so there is virtually no supervision.

As a result, the pressures on the church schools are very strong and they feel stretched to the limit. Selwyn's reputation means that they feel this pressure a great deal. But it also means that they have a strong parents' committee as they are dealing with people who want, and are prepared to pay for, good education. The location is seen by some parents as an asset as it protects the students from the "temptations" of urban life, but it also reinforces some of the problems of communication.

This conversation has a clear connection with the words of the Prime Minister and the Archbishop on Sunday past. The Archbishop's credentials in education (a B.Ed. and headmastership of Selwyn) match the hope of Selwyn that a Faculty of Education at the proposed university would be on the list for both church and state.

We also inspected the very new, large, well-decorated with Melanesian classic art, financially well-grounded (to judge from the plaques on pews, etc.) chapel, dedicated the previous year by Terry Brown as Acting Primate of Melanesia (so described on the plaque, rather than as Bishop of Malaita!).

After a push from Eric and others from the Selwyn offices (we were on flat ground) we headed home for supper.

Thursday 4 June.

We began the day with a visit to the COM offices where I arranged an appointment with the Archbishop for the next morning and left the envelope from Jill Cruse for Fr Seka which I had (*mea culpa*) forgotten to take to Kohimarama the day before. We also arranged an extension of the loan of the Hilux until Sunday afternoon and my trip to the airport.

We set out for the Christian Care Centre, which Dorothy and I had visited in 2008. Unfortunately we could not go to TNK and visit the Sisters of the Church. Their road was in such terrible shape because of enormous potholes full of water that if the Hilux had stalled in one we would have had to wait for a tow truck to get us get us out (as had happened to the CSC truck during our visit in 2008) with no guarantee that it would arrive within a day – it didn’t last year.



Photo 14- CCC new kindergarten building



Photo 13-new Chapel - Selwyn College

The drive to the CCC was on an excellent road, a circumstance perhaps not unconnected with the fact that the present Sister in charge is also a relative of the Governor of Guadalcanal. Sister gave us a guided tour, especially of the new building which contains facilities for kindergarten and other resources for children. The building also has some office space. The sisters are very pleased with the work. The residence building which we saw in 2008 has a serious problem – it is a two-storey building, quite new, but its wooden vertical beams such as doorposts are infested with white ants. This is a classic problem when the builders cut corners and do not take the right

preventative measures. It has only recently been discovered and clearly must be addressed immediately. This may delay the planned construction (the concrete blocks are on site) of a kitchen and dining room for the sisters, presently in a leaf house on stilts and in serious need of replacement.

The new sister in charge is a refreshing change – relations between the two communities of Sisters are improved, as well relations with the mothers and children housed at the Centre. It remains the only such resource in the entire country, so its services are in great demand. The Church receives much credit for its institution, though its life is not always serene – strong security measures against angry and violent

husbands and fathers is a constant necessity. As well as the members of the two womens' communities there are also a Melanesian brother and an SSF brother.

Jill had asked about the question of VIM partners, but there are steady offers in that department from Australian church folk, and that seems a more practical way of proceeding, given that Honiara is only three hours from Brisbane.

They still need some protection, a seawall, from water from the stream close to the property, although they had not recently experienced the event which occurred a week before the visit Dorothy and I made in 2008 – the invasion of the property by a crocodile which swam up the stream from the ocean just a few metres from the Centre. It had been dispatched by a Sister with an axe.

All in all, apart from the white ants, it was an encouraging visit.

After a push for the Hilux, we headed home, stopping on the highway for lunch in an Indian restaurant.

The rest of the day was spent attending to e-mail and other practical details.

Friday, June 5.

The day began with a visit to St Nicholas School where I had been invited to address the daily opening exercises of the school. It is the largest (and arguably best) Anglican school in Honiara with a program from kindergarten through the 7th form, as far as one can go in the Solomons. The principal is the sister of Archbishop Vunagi, and Derrick Au, a resident in Terry's house, is in the 5th form. It was a classic event in the British educational tradition: the whole school gathered (youngest in the front to oldest at the back), there were opening prayers, lots of announcements (it was the last day of exams and the day before the "winter" break of a month) and a speech by me. I had asked Derrick what I should talk about and he said "education", so I spoke, after some introductory words about the differences between our countries (size and climate) and our similarities (nobody in the rest of the world knows anything about our countries), about the things they should be working at in their education: acquiring knowledge, nurturing creativity and imagination, developing direction and purpose. Impossible to gauge the effect, if any.

I then had an hour with the Archbishop. He expressed gratitude for the Primate's letter and the sense that Archbishop Hiltz had a clear appreciation of Melanesian church life, culture and values from his experience of the Melanesian church at Lambeth 2008. He was also grateful for the Canterbury cross and its historic connection with the Primates Meeting.

Mostly he wanted to ask me for an evaluation of some projects that he feels are necessary at the beginning of his time. One is some sorting out of the matters surrounding the death of the seven Brothers. SI is one of the few South Pacific countries with a free press (cf. Fiji!), and there has been much written about the role played by the Brothers and the COM during the ethnic tension. There has even been speculation that the Archbishop's message to the leader who eventually murdered the men also contained a letter from the



Photo 15-Derrick Au, 5th Form student & MGP

Prime Minister. Sir Ellison has denied this (and Terry believes that to be true) but there are still questions about the internal life of the Brotherhood that Archbishop Vunagi wants to clarify internally. I responded that I thought that endeavour, even with all its potential hazards, would be worthwhile for the ongoing life of the Brotherhood and the Church.

The other specific concern he wants to address is the matter of the renegade bishop who turned up at the installation and has established his church on Ysabel. The Archbishop is from Ysabel (his father-in-law was the first Melanesian bishop of Ysabel) so he feels some pressure in this regard. The “church” is a tiny operation, and he wants some sort of settlement that would be amicable – the bishop was formally deposed some years ago, so it is not a matter where draconian discipline is necessary or desirable. My advice was that that would be appropriate but a lesser priority than the Brotherhood.

His other concern is the matter of visiting within the province and within the diocese (Central Melanesia) of which the Archbishop is diocesan (more on that later in this report). A Canadian primate could scarcely counsel against visiting (“What is the difference between God and Ted Scott?” “God is everywhere; Ted is everywhere except Toronto.”), especially as Sir Ellison’s responsibilities (Chair of the Lambeth 2008 Planning Committee) and illnesses severely restricted his activity within the province and diocese. So my advice was positive about that priority. He is close to 60, the mandatory retirement age for Melanesian bishops, so he will have six or seven years, and he needs a running start. (The age of 60 is a ruling of the first Primate, a non-Melanesian, and probably needs re-examination as other bishops have received an extension – Ellison told me during the ethnic tension that it would be disastrous if Terry had to retire at 60, so Terry ended up in his last year as Acting Primate, stressful for him but good news for the Province.)

My image of the primacy as a “moving walkway” is just as valid in a small province as a large one; I also shared with him some of the advice about retreats and spiritual reinforcement that Michael Ramsey had shared with me in 1978 at the beginning of my episcopate.

The afternoon was spent preparing a Trinity Sunday sermon for St Alban’s, a large parish on the east side of Bishop’s Dale.

The Archbishop invited Terry and me to join in a dinner on the grounds of Bishop’s Dale for the clergy and their wives of the Diocese of Central Melanesia. The diocese includes most of Guadalcanal – the western end (including SSF, Melanesian Sisters and Selwyn College) is in the Diocese of Central Solomons, whose “see city” is Tulagi, in a small archipelago visible from Guadalcanal. Tulagi was the colonial seat of government until World War II when the Japanese captured it. The plan is to enlarge the size of Central Solomons by adding much more of Guadalcanal, reducing the primatial diocese to Honiara and the area adjacent. The issue of boundaries will be complicated by language and other local issues, but the changes are clearly necessary.

A good sign, well received by the clergy of Central Melanesia diocese, was a clergy gathering for two days in the first week of the Archbishop’s tenure, followed by this dinner. The dinner was a classic Melanesian event. The clergy, 40 or so, were seated at the bottom of the garden by the sea wall, all in a long row with their backs to the ocean, facing the lawn and the house in the background. The Archbishop and his wife sat on two chairs facing the clergy across about 5 metres of grass. The wives were seated in the shelter of a circular building, with a roof but open on the sides, surrounded by a circular bench –

inside the bench and under the roof was all the food, covered with cloths. (Terry and I sat with the wives.)

The Vicar General of the diocese was Master of Ceremonies. There were addresses of welcome from the Chancellor and other officers, the clergy introduced themselves, then the wives did likewise, and finally the Archbishop addressed the clergy. The tone was formal, but the mood seemed personal and welcoming. After prayers we gathered our food, first the Vunagis, then the clergy and then the wives, and we all ate in our places. The Archbishop asked Terry and me to address the clergy (Terry talked about the project for the COM Archives). There was some singing of old school songs and some hymns and then we dispersed, Terry and I for the short walk home.

Saturday 6 June.

In the morning Terry, I, and some of the boys went to market and some other shops in Honiara. For the noon meal the cathedral MU was having a fundraising lunch on the grass between the Dean's (temporary) house, and Bishop's Dale, so we ate with them.



Photo 16 +Terry's new house

In the afternoon we went to inspect the house where Terry would move on July 1. One of Terry's staff (a driver) that I remember from my visit to Auki with Sam Carrière in 2001, Derrick Au, now married and living in Honiara, has built two houses on a ridge not far from the diocesan houses where Terry had been staying. They are both rental properties, and the COM and Derrick have agreed on a rent considerably less than he was getting from the previous tenant. Two considerations moved Derrick: the previous tenants were young Asian businessmen and they left the place a shambles, but the Au family are also a strong

Malaita church family. Derrick's brother Michael teaches at Airahu, and a nephew (also Derrick) is a bright student, living with Terry and doing well at St Nicholas School.

The house is built on posts, off the ground, has two bedrooms, one less than the COM house, so not all the students can live there, but the advantages are many. The house and appliances are much newer, the area is much quieter (the other house was on the main highway west and very noisy, especially in the night), and the walk up the hill from the bus will be good exercise. I pray that Terry's library will fit in the house.

Derrick Sr showed us around the houses, in which he was doing some work, and they looked in good shape.



Photo 17 - new neighbour - Derrick's 2nd house

Dinner that evening was a farewell for me and the boys gave me a new translation of the Bible “Olketa Toktok long Pijin Baebol” signed by them all. After dinner I finished the sermon and packed for the trip home.

Sunday, 7 June.

Eucharist at St Alban’s was at 8 am. The church, close to the sea, with open walls, was full (Sir Ellison, who lives nearby, was in the congregation). The segregation between the sexes in the congregation was not universally observed, but mostly.

My sermon was a clear, simple exposition of the Trinity in heretical terms (modalism, I think, Eugene Fairweather would have called it) on which I have relied for Trinity Sunday for a long time. In fact, this Trinity Sunday was the 50th anniversary of my ordination as a deacon – if someone had asked me in 1959 where I would be, and why, fifty years hence, I could not have come within a country mile of a correct answer.

After church there was coffee served by the sea wall and the newly-formed men’s group did some singing (Ellison is a member). There were lots of young people at church – the parish has a very effective youth worker.



Photo 18- just starting the car

At noon we headed to the airport in order to be there two hours early, all of us (Terry, most of the guys, Derrick Sr – he had come to the airport in 2008 to see Dorothy and me off) in the Hilux after the obligatory push.

The trip home was uneventful: Australian customs allowed me to transport the custom jewelry I had been given, the Sydney airport hotel we found on the Internet was fine (built on the Ibis scale), the night in Sydney short because of the three-hour preliminary time, the flight to Vancouver smooth and an hour shorter than on the way out, the flight to Toronto dreary.

Was it all worth the close to \$4,000? Well, for me of course, it was a joy from start to finish. Even the hiccups – the non-performing Hilux battery, the inability to get to TNK and the Sisters,... were not desperate. Certainly my ineptitude with a camera, and the fact that I am totally unused to remembering that I should take pictures (when I was working, others did that, and Dorothy always does it in normal life), means that the pictorial harvest is poor. I did not walk around the cathedral during the administration of Communion at the installation taking photos as the Maori bishop did.

When the Archbishop invited me to talk to the Central Melanesia clergy, I said that the relationship between the Canadian and the Melanesian church was an important one for us, even though the geography might make it seem unlikely. I said that Archbishop Hiltz, knowing that it was impossible for him to come in person, also knew that this was not a relationship in which simply a letter would suffice,

so he sent a person as well. It was a gesture that I recognized from the time of Archbishop Runcie, who at times of joy or struggle in the Communion (especially for Desmond Tutu) always sent a person.

Last year after our visit to the synod of the Diocese of Malaita, Dorothy and I were in Honiara for a brief visit with CSC on our way home. Unexpectedly, we were invited to the COM office for lunch with the staff. Coincidentally, David Vunagi was in the office on his way back to Temotu (his diocese). When they asked me to speak, I thought they might ask me about our experience on Malaita; but they wanted to hear about the Canadian church. I was very taken aback – my involvement in the life of the church is parochial, not national. But I thought that the issues might be the state of our church as it could affect their church, so my comments were not about the gay issue (which, at least externally, seems to bother them little) but about support for other provinces in the Communion. I don't know much, but I do know that in terms of staff and financial resources, overseas work would be perceived as less than it was. I set all this in the context of an increased commitment to our own aboriginal community (e.g., the NIA Bishop) in response to the problems that had arisen from our history to smite us (about which they were well aware and sympathetic), but I was quite clear that this meant less money leaving the country. So (perhaps naughtily) I suggested that they might think of ways to keep their face and voice before us.

I hope that VST might be persuaded to give the Archbishop an honorary doctorate. At one level it may seem pointless in a country where doctorates are rare, but the honouring of leaders by outsiders is significant. I suspect it would be a first (Terry would know) and I think it would be welcome.

I have no idea when the next Primates Meeting takes place, but some significant conversation then between the Archbishop of Melanesia and the Primate of Canada could be profitable. I did not become aware of an upcoming significant occasion in Melanesia that would warrant a primatial visit, but such a conversation might produce some ideas.

So with those brief thoughts I close the report with my deepest thanks to the Primate for his surprising request which translated into an exciting time of revisiting and of new learning for me, and to the staff for all the enabling work and advice which made it possible. It was full of unexpected joys and blessing.

Respectfully submitted,

+Michael

PS – In the report I have used the abbreviation COM for the Melanesian church, because it's still what is on the provincial office and in common parlance, but the church is correctly styled "The Anglican Church of Melanesia".