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Hi Brothers & Sisters

Greetings and prayers from Lae, Papua New Guinea. I pray that you are well and safe in this time of worldwide turmoil. I wish that I could make this report 100% Covid-19 free, but unfortunately it is affecting even the remotest places on earth, including P.N.G.

I have been having ongoing issues with my WiFi device, meaning that I haven't been able to connect to the internet consistently for several weeks (contributing to the now 6+ weeks since the last report!). Some days it has taken hours before I could get a stable connection, and since school started, I just haven't had time to sit and repeatedly try. Yesterday I purchased a replacement and am waiting for the SIM card to be activated this afternoon. Hopefully this upgrade will be more user friendly. If you have sent an email in recent weeks and have not received a reply, please resend your email. Also, I am rarely on Facebook now, so email is still the best option for communication.

The first term classes at the Melanesian Bible College kicked off on February 5<sup>th</sup>, with lots of excited students – new and returning. The new classrooms were a hit and entered with much appreciation, as was the newly renovated library building. A few of the families were slow in arriving, but eventually we had everyone expected this year, along with several local day students:

Seven 3<sup>rd</sup> year students

Bomi & Miriam from Gain, Morobe Province,  
James from Bali Island, West New Britain Province,  
Kris from Port Moresby,  
Lithus from Noa, Morobe Province,  
Max & Sikale from Kakimar, Madang Province.

Ten 2<sup>nd</sup> year students

John & Marianne from Ibiro, Bougainville,  
John & Nancy from Kundiawa, Chimbu Province,  
Kenneth & Rose from Bogia, Madang Province,  
Philip & Ruth from Wangoi, Chimbu Province,

Sou & Rita from Motete, Oro Province

And seven 1<sup>st</sup> year students

Gon from Port Moresby.

Matthew & Patricia from Ibiro, Bougainville,

Sent & Jamien from Mati, Western Highlands Province,

Uyuk & Lioni from Omuru, Madang Province.

Day students:

Natak (MBC congregation), Mubiang (Situm #2 congregation),

Boas, Kerian, Naomi, and Frieda (Boundary Road congregation).

Block (term) 1 went well, but block 2 had a shaky start on March 9 and came to a full stop on March 18<sup>th</sup>, when the M.B.C. school year was cancelled due to the threat of Covid-19. That day we celebrated with 1<sup>st</sup> year students, Matthew & Patricia, as they both put on Christ in the waters of baptism, and then we had tearful goodbyes on Thursday and Friday as we sent off all but one family. Sou and Rita, and their children, hope to return to Motete by plane this coming Tuesday. We have been left feeling sorry and a bit dazed by the suddenness of it all, but agree with the decision made by school principal, Jab Mesa, and the Highland church elders, especially as the first case of Covid-19 in P.N.G. (in Lae) was declared last night by Prime Minister Marape. If we had continued through to the end of school in May, it is very likely that our students would have ended up stuck in Lae for an indefinite period, or would have been at greater risk of carrying the virus to their families and communities. Please pray for them, some of whom are still traveling as I write this.

*Literacy Class in library building (x2 below)*





For the time being, my literacy class is continuing. Once a lock-down situation is declared here in Lae, it will be suspended until it is safe to resume. With only one M.B.C. student in the literacy class this year (Marianne), and four from the community (Rose, Jenny, Melissa, and Dorothy), it made sense to continue, at least for a short time. Two of the remaining students are experiencing marital issues (one currently in court in Madang and the other experiencing domestic violence) and are frequently absent, the remaining two have been coming consistently and are learning well and really eager to continue. Please pray for each of them, especially if we do go into lock-down here, as I expect will happen soon.

In the midst of the busy school schedule, we also experienced more heartbreak. Brother Mule Honeo, Miring's cousin whom I asked you to pray for in the last report, passed away from liver cancer on February 10. The same day sister in Christ, Rose Binding, also died after a prolonged illness. On the 21, sister Aggie Leleba passed after a long battle with T.B. Her funeral took place on March 11. And on March 5, Jab's father passed away on Tami Island. He would have been 88 years of age on March 10, so we started block 2 remembering him in celebration and tears. Six years ago I adopted a flea-infested, emaciated stray mixed German Shepherd with a dislocated back-leg, named Suzy. Over the years she became a truly loving friend, and my constant companion, comforter, and protector. In 2014, the vet estimated that she was 6 or 7 years old. Sadly, on February 24, we lost Suzy too, and have been feeling her loss keenly ever since.

Your prayers for all of us in Lae in the coming months are and will be greatly appreciated, as we also continue to pray for you. The health system here isn't up to handling a Covid-19 outbreak, and the result could be quite devastating. We continue to pray for His protection and guidance. The 2020 Ladies' Workshop, which was scheduled for mid-April and was to be hosted by the Boundary Road congregation here in Lae, has been cancelled. Plans to hold another literacy teacher's training session have also been cancelled for this year. Although I haven't heard from the team scheduled to come from

Australia in June, I expect that their trip will also be interrupted. As of today, there are no incoming international flights into Port Moresby, and Australia closed its borders to all foreign citizens yesterday. My scheduled trip home this year will be postponed to the end of the year or to next year, accordingly. I anticipate spending many long hours in the M.B.C. library in coming weeks, and a much quieter year than normal.



*Becky Mesa teaching at the recent Lae City Combined ladies' class hosted by the Wagan congregation at Sipaia.*



*Enjoying the cool ocean breeze (but not the sand flies) at Sipaia.*



*Headstart class with teacher Dogo in the background.*



*Madang Province students saying goodbye on Thursday as they prepared to leave Lae.*



*Brother Michael Tatara preparing to baptize 1st year student, Matthew.*



*Becky welcoming Patricia and Matthew to the church, with Jab and other students in the background.*

## Prayer Points

1. M.B.C. students, traveling/readjusting to life in their villages after the cancellation of the school year.
2. Miring, who has been having ongoing issues with high blood pressure over the past few weeks, and is scheduled for tests next week.
3. The Covid-19 situation worldwide, and that it can be contained here in Lae without reaching the communities.
4. The literacy class – its continuation, and for the students experiencing marital problems.
5. New Christians Matthew and Patricia.
6. Several families mourning losses in the past 6 weeks.
7. Guidance for the Australian team that had planned to visit PNG in June.
8. My own plans to travel home late this year or sometime next.
9. Taylor & Robyn David. Still waiting for more definitive answers regarding Taylor's brain tumour. He is struggling greatly with seizures. Taylor's brother drowned last month in Milne Bay Province. Please pray for peace and comfort for Taylor and his family.

May God's peace and comfort be with you in coming weeks.

With love in Him,

*Ruth*

### **Sponsors:**

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