

**Reflections on Leadership Training in Papua New Guinea**

Touching down at Jacksons International Airport in Papua New Guinea is the beginning of entering into a raw and intriguing world where stone age village life and modern metropolitan life collide. The 460 churches of CBC (Christian Brethren Churches) are represented in the cities by largely rural peoples who have come to the city to find a living amongst wantoks (similar clan and language groups). Many live in settlements which are not much more than squatter settlements. The CBC churches in Port Moresby and Lae are planted in these environments. Among these churches are young people who are increasingly educated (called elites) and are beginning to find significant roles in government and in the mining and educational sector. There are tensions that exist that are beginning to reveal some deep questions regarding issues like what a good leader is and what it means to be a Christian in this fluid and evolving environment.

With these tensions in mind some of us with recent PNG experience (missionary kids from the 1960’s) feel the need to help the city churches with some seminars that would help promising leadership wrestle with these issues together in an interactive way. I would combine a trip to the centres of Port Moresby and Lae with a trip to Mount Hagen (Banz) in my role as Chair of the Academic Advisory Committee of Christian Leaders Training College (CLTC)in the highlands of PNG. CLTC is an interdenominational Bible College that trains for leadership in the church and society of not only PNG but the south pacific island regions. CBC churches have used the training at diploma, degree and masters levels for the last 49 years. CLTC is a registered school of higher education in PNG offering awards that are recognised by the government. CBC now has a number of BTh graduates working in church ministry.

Below are some reflections related to the most recent trip in August 2013:

Each evening there are sessions at a local brethren church in Port Moresby out at 8 mile (a half hour drive). The sessions are meant to be interactive and speaking to issues the locals have raised since last years training. I got a surprise to find that the church was full with just about as many women as men and even some children! The pleasing thing is that most of the brethren churches are represented. We have been concentrating on the importance of discipleship in leadership training and the feedback has been very encouraging. They want more of this and I suspect, need it. Their comments are that they have not had good teaching on these things for a long time. The sessions last from 7:15-9:00 PM with questions flowing afterwards. I am finding it a stretch to pick up on my pigin sufficiently to hear what they are talking about, but it is coming back. The last session in Port Moresby is this evening. Tomorrow I fly to Lae and repeat the process each evening and then speak at Omili Christian Fellowship on Sunday. On Monday I travel back through Port Morseby to Mount Hagen for CLTC meetings.

Then at the airport in Port Moresby en route to Mount Hagen:

The last week has been great in terms of connecting with a lot of folk in the leadership training modules. Busy evenings and quieter days. I have been emphasising the need for discipleship. I feel that this is a key area. We have also looked at selecting and growing leaders and then at strategic planning. The teaching has been accepted really well. Pray that it will be effective and long lasting as they seek to put some of it into practice.

Our time in Lae was a real benefit to those who attended the leadership training. We did this with the youth and leadership (Thursday- leaders only) together on Friday night and Saturday morning. They had a night of prayer on top of it all so we finished with a challenge to build a tower out of 100 balloons- 2 teams. It involved everyone and was such fun. We chatted over the implications of beginning with a game plan (we explored what this might be for ‘reaching out’) and how leadership and relationships worked. The training was well received and many asked when we were able to come again.

The development in Lae city is exploding. There are containers stacked four to five high along the old airport in town and then at several other locations around the city. A new fishing port is planned with other city developments and another tuna cannery. For a city that has been stagnant for the last twenty years, this is mind blowing!

PNG is in such a development phase it is unbelievable. The number of cars in both Lae and Port Moresby have doubled in a year. Pressure on infrastructure is immense and corruption continues largely unabated as the rule of law is less obvious than it has been in the past. The church and its mission is strategic in a country on the edge.

While PNG has had many missionaries in the past there are no New Zealanders in full time ministry in PNG currently. The role of partnering in mission with PNG has changed to one of mentoring and coaching locals. They are hungry to learn and grow. Their issues are complex and difficult to solve in a country that is only sixty years out of the stone age so they still need committed people with skills who can come alongside to partner with them. There are opportunities to serve in strategic roles. If you would like more information, please contact Russell Thorp ( missionsdirector@gc3.org.nz ) or check our GC3 website <http://www.gcim.org.nz/index.php/serve> .

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