

Papua New Guinea:

Challenges for Prayer:

The nation faces many crises just to prevent meltdown, never mind to oversee progress. Some groups and governments involved with PNG see an impending failed state and social chaos. Corruption is endemic and hampering progress. Pray for a government that will act with courage and foresight, moral integrity and wisdom.

a) *The sheer ethnic diversity* and geographic isolation of most groups make attempts to mould a single national PNG identity monumentally complex. Tribal fighting and revenge killings have been ongoing for millennia. Pray for a means to establish both a peace that surpasses the mere absence of violence and an identity that transcends immediate ethnic ties.

b) *Economic development* is an uphill struggle. The vast wealth of natural resources is hard to access, and is plundered by rapacious foreign companies and their local collaborators, a rich elite. The majority of citizens (>75%) survive through subsistence farming. Corruption dissipates the bulk of foreign aid and a significant amount of the national expenditure meant to help locals.

c) *Accelerating urbanization* intensifies pressure on the job market, public utilities and health care, ethnic relations and social stability. Violent crime in cities is rising. Traditional structures of village life are not present in urban squatter camps, hence the accompanying social decay.

The last 130 years of great mission success in PNG started along the coast, moved inland, reaching finally to the Highlands and almost every people. Some have seen mass movements to Christ. Over 95% of all peoples now claim to be Christian. Praise God for the presence of a living, vibrant Church today. But a deeper level of discipleship is lacking in many places, sometimes resulting in disillusionment and a turning back to ungodly traditions, drunkenness, gambling, “cargo cults” or other syncretistic groups. Revivals have come (East and West Sepik, New Britain, North Solomons and Highlands areas); more are needed to see lasting change.

AIDS is an impending scourge with HIV infections increasing at an alarming rate, approaching a pandemic comparable to that of sub-Saharan Africa. Lack of awareness is a major challenge: mostly spread through sexual immorality, HIV is often attributed to all kinds of causes, some superstitious. TSCF(**IFES**), Anglicans (Anglicare) and Baptists are just three ministries educating on causes of AIDS, removing the associated stigma and cultivating biblical lifestyles so as to eradicate the infection.

Witchcraft and sorcery are on the rise again. “Witch hunts” are becoming more common wherein those suspected of black magic are tortured into a confession and killed. This gruesome trend is in part a reflection of the spiritually-attuned culture, but also a reaction to the rapid increase in AIDS. Pray for an end to occult activities and related violence; the existence of such problems in a 96% Christian nation illustrates both the failure of and challenges to the Church.

There are many challenges facing the churches:

a) *Effective discipling* is the most urgent and prevalent need. Nominalism, syncretism and pollution of Christianity with spiritism and the occult are sadly widespread. Culturally appropriate ways of building biblical faith, character, lifestyle and worldview must be developed; pray for creative, insightful groups to achieve this.

b) *Failure to engage with Scripture.* Lack of Scripture translations and widespread functional illiteracy generate both spiritual stunted growth and vulnerability to nominalism or theological

error. Pray for more Bible and discipleship material specifically developed for oral learners.

c) *The Wantok (“one talk”) system is one of mutual sharing* – important in a society of subsistence hunting and farming. Yet the communal, trans-generational sense of obligation and mutuality can not only hinder economic progress but also restrain those who wish to press on in their Christian walk.

d) *Continued divisiveness based on ethnicity*. Strong tribal ties, ancient animosities and diversity of languages persist. These barriers hinder fellowship and the flow of spiritual blessing.

e) *Denominational division* is less now than in the past, but unity and cooperation are far from achieved. The PNG Council of Churches draws together mainline denominations; the Evangelical Alliance does the same for most Protestant and many independent groups. They see good progress at the leadership level. Pray for divisions to be broken down, particularly on the local congregational level.

f) *Attempts to Islamize PNG* are underway and will be an increasing challenge to the Church. Pray for adequate preparation and equipping that will enable Christians to wisely face such encroachment.

Leadership training is a top priority. Churches and missions run many small Bible schools, and there are a few denominational theological colleges. The Christian Leaders’ Training College (CLTC) – with 120 full-time students, a community of 500 from all over PNG and the Solomon Islands, and an international faculty – trains leaders for churches. Churches are recognizing TEE as a valuable training tool for marginally-literate, rural pastors and church workers who received minimal grounding in the faith. Pray for:

a) *Men and women called of God* to full-time Christian work. Highly paid jobs lure those with good education. Primitive, isolated conditions of rural areas dissuade many from service, leaving believers there without good teaching or leadership.

b) *Bible teachers and pastors* who can impart a love of God’s Word in a way that both applies to the local culture and helps shape the spiritual life of the nation.

c) *Specialized training programs..* CLTC (Centers in Port Moresby and Lae) prepares leaders for urban ministries; increasing urbanization makes this a strategic ministry. Goroka Baptist Bible College (run by **ABWE**) prepares Christians for ministry work in the church and in schools as teachers and administrators.

d) *TEE programs* serving PNG and the Pacific, run mainly by CLTC and the Evangelical Brotherhood Church with enormous influence. Over 1,000 students enroll annually. Pray for more and better-trained staff and for financial provision; inflation and increased postage and air freight costs hamper rural students’ ability to enroll. Pray for more TEE programs in Tok Pisin, developed by Melanesians with good theological education and an understanding of local spiritual needs.

The vision of sending missionaries is growing. For 30 years the Church sent out small numbers of cross-cultural workers, many through **OM** and **YWAM**. The mid-’80s formation of the indigenous PNG Missionary Association stimulated mission awareness, sending workers primarily to Indonesia. Newer indigenous agencies such as PNG World Missions and denominational groups now send to a variety of fields. Drawing on the vision and model of the Deep Sea Canoe movement (missionary movement of Pacific Islanders), CLTC runs an annual mobilizing conference (Launch Out). **NTM** is instrumental in training and sending nationals to serve cross-culturally at home and abroad, and CLTC offers a missions course. Papua (the Indonesian side of the island) is an area of particular interest, as PNG nationals potentially have a crucial role in helping Papuans withstand increasing Islamization. The vision for a burst of missions from PNG to the unreached world is rising.

A land with a rich legacy of missionary success and sacrifice, PNG’s large missionary presence is mostly focused on health, education, development, translation, teaching, discipling, leadership training and support work. The larger mission agencies are: **WBT, NTM, Swiss Evangelical Brotherhood Mission, Pioneer Bible Translators, CCCC, LM,**

ABWE, MAF, Pioneers. Pray for:

- a) *The gospel to take a more New Guinean shape.*** Christianity must become more relevant to nationals if it is to have the leavening effect society desperately needs.
- b) *Those building up the existing church.*** Discipleship and leadership training are crucial tasks and the main challenges facing Christianity in PNG.
- c) *Those involved in health, education and community development programs.*** The pressures facing PNG society need addressing in a brave but loving way.

Aircraft of missionary organizations are an essential lifeline for churches and missions. Many areas are only accessible by air and therefore highly dependent on such ministry. Flying conditions are among the worst in the world with thick forests, high mountains, dense clouds and treacherous weather. Understaffing often reduces the number of flights. Pray for the flying staff of **MAF** (36 expat and 120 national workers with 14 planes), of **SIL/JAARS** (six planes and two helicopters), **NTM** (three planes and one helicopter), and all who service these aircraft and travel in them.

The younger generation hangs in the balance. Modernity/post modernity, globalization and social crises could see generations of Christian heritage all but wiped out unless young people are properly disciplined. Unemployment and the snare of gangs are two of the biggest challenges. **SU** has good ministry in high schools. **TSCF(IFES)** has 66 groups comprising 10,000 tertiary student members. **YWAM** has valuable input in youth training and mobilizing for evangelism and missions. Camps (especially at Easter) are very significant for youth ministry.

Translation and literacy programs and appropriate Christian literature are fundamental for acculturating the gospel. **SIL, NTM, PNG Bible Translation Association, The Bible Society, Pioneer Bible Translators** and other indigenous groups participate in over 260 translation projects; about 210 languages have a NT, but only 12 or so have a complete Bible. Translation teams are needed for 160 languages and possibly for a further 250. Pray for and indigenous marginal sects. Many are nominal with much syncretism. translators, for means of making the arduous task faster and more accurate and for indigenous translators/language assistants. Pray also for literacy training – the written, translated Word of God is of little help if no one is reading it. Good use of storytelling and oral forms of Scripture can also have great impact.

Christian helps ministries for prayer:

- a) *Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship*** (CRMF), with 19 staff, serves churches and missions by providing two-way radio contact for those in isolated areas.
- b) *Local radio*** is a vital tool for PNG. Isolation and illiteracy make radio both a link to the outside world and a medium for learning. A number of stations operate nationally or regionally. Radio Light collects and records indigenous Christian music, a particularly effective means of evangelism and teaching.
- c) *Christian audio resources*** – including cassettes, CDs, DVDs and MP3s - are effective tools for evangelism and teaching, especially for large numbers of rural illiterates, many of whom speak only the language of their own ethnic group. Language Recordings (**GRN**) has produced materials in 650 languages and dialects.
- d) *Christian literature.*** There are five main publishing groups: Christian Books Melanesia (Brethren), Evangelical Brotherhood Church (Swiss Brethren, with five bookshops), Kristen Press (Lutheran), the interdenominational Melanesian Institute and The Bible Society. Most towns have Christian bookstores; **CLC** has two stores and a mail order ministry. Christian songbooks and Bible memory books prove effective for learning biblical truth