

Newton News

Dear friends

I have returned from Newton College and am adjusting from a climate where keeping cool is a challenge, to one where the lure of a fire on a wintry morning is very attractive.

Over the past six months, I have spent about half of my time in Popondetta. It has been a time of change and challenge for the college, but I believe we are in a place of greater optimism.

During the last trip, we saw a lot of evidence of the renewed partnership with the Australian Church. A shipping container arrived at Newton College (not without the usual delays that seem to be part of life in PNG) and that included donations of materials as diverse as diesel generators to library texts, from toilet suites to power tools, from water piping to chicken wire. All the materials were donated and the first benefit of such donations is the gift of encouragement. Lecturers and students who live at a near subsistence level were deeply encouraged by the sense of care and partnership from their Christian brothers and sisters in Australia.



The container arrives at Newton College, with materials from Australia

Two gifts of the material kind were especially valued. The gift of a more powerful water pump, piping and fitting has done much to improve the water supply and even, in some houses, provide an occasional shower.



Many books produce a very large smile from Br Josiah

The gift of about 70 cartons of books has brought about a major update in the library, which had become very dated and depleted. With changes to the curriculum, the students are using the library a lot more and the addition of a large number of more up to date books has produced real excitement.

Beyond the gift of materials, there has been an equally important gift in the form of visitors. During my last stay at the college, we had Peter Leppert, from Bright, and David Chambers, from Heyfield, spend some time with us. Peter has retired from CSIRO and his passion is sustainable horticulture, but he is also a very good handyman. David is an engineer, who has just retired from Gippsland water. Peter worked alongside our newly appointed maintenance person to set up a workshop and begin building repairs. David helped with some major repairs to the water

supply, including the installation of two large tanks and the new pump. Both found the climate exhausting and the people wonderful.

The development of partnership visits is of great benefit to the college, but also offers much to those who take the time to experience something of the life of the Church in a developing nation on our doorstep.

As we look forward, we would particularly appreciate the contribution of a librarian who could give 2-3 weeks to help steer our library forward, and also those in the building trades, who can help restore buildings that have had little maintenance since construction in the late 1970s.

Students and lecturers have been adapting to new courses, as the curriculum is being brought up to date. With more emphasis on a variety of assessment instruments, students are adapting to doing their own research. We have had to provide additional support to help students gain proficiency at research and essay writing. The hope is that these foundations will eventually produce some contemporary Melanesian theology.



David Chambers from Heyfield worked with students to connect new water tanks.



Peter Leppert, from Bright in Victoria, relaxes with some freshly picked local refreshment.

The field education program has also been strengthened this year. First year students have their placement around the college chapel and community. They have been learning basic liturgical skills, but have also been working together to establish a ministry to the young people of the college and surrounding community. Some sports days have been attended by great numbers of young people. Third year students all have placements in neighbouring parishes.

Newton College has always understood that in Melanesian culture, local community leadership involves roles and expectations for both men and women. So, alongside the formation program for the male students, there is a complementary program for the women (about two-thirds of the students are married).

This program continues to have three main strands; literacy, health and sewing. In 2018 the college was involved in piloting a new literacy program in association with Anglicare and ABM (Australia) the program is called "The Popondetta Literacy Program". It involves four levels of learning and is orientated towards those who have been disadvantaged in the acquisition of literacy skills. The program seeks to enhance functional literacy and associated life skills.

The health program has involved a number of speakers on key topics, from household hygiene, diet through to issues in childhood health. One of the speakers in the early part of the year, Lindy Driver, combined her long experience as a registered nurse with experience of basic healthcare in Africa, to present on a number of subjects at the college. One small gift that was indicative of how small, but carefully considered, contributions can make a big difference. Every family in the college, including every child, was presented with a toothbrush. While this might seem unremarkable to many readers, the fact is that the miniscule allowances on which students live means that they will often prioritise other choices with their spending, so for most of the children, this was their first toothbrush.

The administration of a college is fundamental to its life and to the goodwill of its supporters. The college has recognised that in recent years the financial reporting has been inadequate and has taken steps to put things right. This will be assisted by new software as well as laptop computers donated by Anglicare SA.

Progress made this year have served to underline the challenges. The college finances are precarious; the total budget is less than \$100,000 and that includes residential support for 17 students, many of them married. The lecturers receive a pittance (about \$AUD 4000 per annum). Nearly every building is in dire need of repair.

Although the college is about 10kl out of Popondetta, there is no college vehicle. That presents a challenge for health and safety as well as being a major inconvenience.

Thank God for the progress made! Pray for the enormous challenges that remain.

+Jeffrey



Figure 1 Bishop Jeffrey hands over one of several laptop computers donated by Anglicare SA.

