

Symmonds' Soundbites

News from Papua New Guinea



Happy Christmas! Hope you are well and looking forward to some special times over the festive season.

It still feels strange to us to have a hot and sunny Christmas! We have already had our MAF Goroka team Christmas party. Joel and Dan had their Tang Soo Do club party at the weekend and there are a few more events still to come.

We are very much enjoying a couple of different Advent devotionals, provided by our church in Nottingham, or recommended by friends. It's great to focus and be reminded of the reason we are celebrating - the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, our Saviour! What a wonder that almighty God exchanged his eternal throne for a lowly stable, all with the purpose of living a perfect life but dying a criminals death - in our place!

Thank you Jesus for your birth, life, death and resurrection, and the hope we have in you.

A few things of note have been happening here in PNG since we last wrote. Here are the highlights...

MAF Ministry Highlights

Sustainable Development Program - Aerial Health Patrols

Back in September Andy explored a new area of the country for the first time. When Andy first visited Balimo in Western Province, during initial familiarisation flights back in 2019, it was a remote bush strip serving the local village. There were no roads or other infrastructure anywhere nearby. Since that time Balimo has been transformed into a main hub of operations for Sustainable Development Program, with a much more substantial airstrip, school, health clinic, training centres, offices and staff accommodation. This organisation is funded by investment of money from one of the major mines in PNG, and its remit is to develop infrastructure, healthcare, education and the economy, focussing currently on Western Province.

A few years ago MAF entered into a partnership with SDP, providing the air transport for SDP's Aerial Health Patrols. These teams go out to provide regular clinics in communities which would otherwise have no access to healthcare. MAF established a base in Balimo a couple of years ago and we now have two aircraft and two pilots based there full time, with a third pilot visiting from other bases on a rotational basis. September saw Andy's first visit to Balimo in this capacity. He flew AHP teams, medevacs and community development flights during this week.



Top: Balimo airstrip and SDP's 'Newtown' Centre left: Andy's first AHP team

Bottom left: Remote Lake Murry airstrip

Centre right: Loading supplies and equipment Bottom right: AHP team arriving at Lake Murray

Building Materials

Building materials are not very glamorous, but they are a huge part of the work of MAF in PNG. There is no other means by which to get these essential materials to many of the remote communities. Recent weeks have included numerous loads delivered to Mibu in the Finisterres Mountains, for the construction of their new primary school, and cement delivered to Yomneki for their new church building.



Loading building timber in Madang for the new primary school at Mibu...



...and unloading it again at the other end!

Trauma Healing Course

In November Helen spent a few days in Mount Hagen, running the Trauma Healing course with some of the older teens from the orphanage.

Helen got involved with using the material from the Trauma Healing Institute after doing an initial course through SIL when we were in Wewak. She has since done further training to enable her to run the course herself, and even teach others to run it.

The material is oral story based and is very well suited to PNG culture and experience. This was the second time Helen has run the course at the orphanage and the teens really engaged with it. They expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to begin working through the serious difficulties they have experienced, in light of the gospel of grace.

Some quotes from the trauma healing course participants:

"I liked the story about suffering because the story's content was like my past and like how I feel."

"I liked the grieving and lamenting stories because I want to call out to God about my needs."

"The story about Joseph was the most helpful story that I heard, because I have faced these kinds of troubles and hevis in my life and I think this story is very helpful to me."



Some of the teens who took part in the trauma healing course.

L-R: Rodney, Rose and Lilley

Pilots' Meeting and Men's Conference

November also brings the annual Pilots' Meeting. These few days see all the pilots from all bases come together for mandatory annual and biennial training, plus great times of fellowship, fun and learning. The days started with devotions and worship, followed by sessions on various topics, and team building challenges.

Pilots' Meeting was followed immediately by the Men's Conference. This was for all male staff, from all bases throughout the country. About 85 guys spent the weekend at the campus of Christian Leaders Training College, at Banz, about 40 mins drive from Mt Hagen.

Teaching sessions were well lead by lecturers from CLTC, sports were enjoyed, and everyone was well fed! It was a great opportunity to meet new



Familiarisation with smoke flares, using up expired ones from aircraft survival kits.



Photo treasure hunt: 'Your team with a road sign!'

Fuel Issues Continue

For a time it seemed the worst of the fuel problems experienced earlier this year were over, but in November Puma Energy announced they would cease supply of JET A1 at the end of the month. Since Puma had a monopoly on aviation fuel, this significantly impacts all air operators in PNG.

MAF is now entirely dependant on the drum fuel supplies shipped in from overseas and this has doubled our fuel costs.

Please pray about this disappointing turn of events.

Hospital and Women's Prison Ministry

Last time we shared about baby Emmanuel, a little boy born with a rare condition where his brain is not fully contained within the skull. Against all expectations he his still alive and, considering the circumstances, doing very well. He is due to have an operation, but despite a few dates for this having been set, the surgeon has so far failed to turn up. Please continue to pray for Emmanuel, mum Wendy, and the other ladies and babies on the ward. Pray the support and gospel message Helen and the other ladies take each week will be a blessing.

The regular Wednesday prison ministry has stopped for the long Christmas break. In PNG everything closes for a month or two in December and January. Schools, government offices, sunday schools, even prison visitation is stopped.

This strikes us as strange, as the prisoners and guards are still there, but that's the way it is! Helen and the other ladies were able to attend the 'close up' a few weeks ago. This happened to fall on the Wednesday and it was a big thing, with churches delivering vegetables and rice and leading a worship session. Helen, Anna, Pricilla and Christie we not involved personally in this, so they took the opportunity this last Sunday to attend the morning service at the prison, sharing in the worship, offering some devotional thoughts and saying proper goodbyes until the Wednesday visits can resume next year. The women really appreciated the Sunday morning visit, which they were not expecting!

Let's hear it for the Boys!

Joel and Daniel are very close to the end of the second semester, half way through their second year at Numonohi Christian Academy. They are enjoying the social aspect of school as well their studies (they do complain about homework though!). We all went to 'Winter Wonderland Skate Night' on Saturday evening. The gym was decked out with various stalls and decorations with a central area for scooters, skateboards and rip sticks. It was a great night and raised funds toward the grade 11 mission trip next year. Joel and Dan are very much looking forward to the Christmas holiday!



Thank you for taking the time to read this update. We are so thankful for your interest and support.

As always, if you have time to get in touch personally, please drop us an email. We'd love to hear from you!

Love from Andy, Helen, Joel and Daniel

Please Pray:

Give Thanks

- For the work MAF is able to do helping and supporting remote communities.
- For the ministries Helen is involved with at hospital and prison.
- That baby Emmanuel is surviving.
- Christmas and the fact we can celebrate our saviour's birth!

Pray For

- Our continued health and well-being.
- Fuel situation.
- Prison and Mama Care ministries.
- Baby Emmanuel, that he will get his operation.
- A new Country Director for MAF PNG. Pray the right person will soon be appointed to this critical role.
- MAF PNG's ministry to continue to have lasting Kingdom impact.