The Roman Catholic Church in Brunei
Brunei Darussalam

Area: 5,270 sq km
Population: 442,400
(Economic Planning and Development 2018.)
Muslim (official) 78.8%, Christian 8.7%, Buddhist 7.8%, other (includes indigenous beliefs) 4.7% (2011 est.)
The Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam
BRUNEI CATHOLIC CHURCH HISTORY

Antonino Ventimiglia (Borneo, 1689-91)

Brunei’s empire at its largest in the 16th century
Milestones in the Brunei church history

- 1325 - Odoric of Pordenone - first missionary to come to the island of Borneo
- 1587 – Two Spanish Franciscan missionaries called into Brunei – Francesco de Santa Maria and Miguel Juan de Plasencia.
1688 – Theatine priest, Fr. Antonio Ventimiglia arrived in Borneo & became the first Vicar Apostolic

1858 – Barambangan mission – Fr. Riva of the Milan Foreign Missionaries (now known as PIME) was put in charge – he built a church and dedicated it to Our Lady of Every Grace

1881 – Mill Hill Missionaries in Labuan

1885 – Brunei became part of the Apostolic Prefecture of Labuan and North Borneo
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- **1915 (24th Aug.)** – First recorded baptism of a Bruneian, baptism done in Labuan, Lucia Liew, by Fr. A. Williams, MHM.
- **1916** - Mr. George Newn Ah Foot with his wife Cecilia Bong and their first daughter

The Liew Family
First Bruneian baptism – Lucia Liew (24/8/1916), Alice Liew (26/11/1917)
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1919 (5\textsuperscript{th} March) – First recorded baptism in Brunei by Fr. A. Williams of Francis Newn.
- 1927 – Brunei became part of the Apostolic Prefecture of Sarawak, Labuan and Brunei.
- 1932 – First Resident priest in Brunei (Fr A. Stotter)
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

1936 – Kuala Belait was made a head station – Fr. Crowther, MHM appointed the first resident priest in KB

Sr. Mary Agnes (Alice Liew) – 1936

Alice Liew was educated at the Convent in Labuan and became a Carmelite nun – first Bruneian to enter a religious order
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1937 - Fr. Piet de Wit was appointed to assist Fr. Crowther. Fr. Piet started the first Catholic school in a rented house owned by Mr. Kay in Jalan Padang.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1941 – Mr. George Newn Ah Foott donated a piece of land in Jalan Kumbang Pasang on which a school, a chapel and the priest living quarters was built.
1929 - 1940

A Roman Catholic Mission was set up in Kuala Belait. The site of the Church/School was located between the present Chung Hwa Middle School and the Foo Chow Association. There was no permanent priest assigned to the Kuala Mission. Priests from the neighbouring Missions visited periodically.

1936 - Celebrating Christmas at the Kuala Belait R.C. School/Church
Fr. A. Stotter (6th from left) served in Kuala Belait from 1930 to 1936

December 1935 - Staff and students in front of the wooden R.C. School/Church in K.B.

Fr. A. Stotter (6th from left) served in Kuala Belait from 1930 to 1936

1936 - Celebrating Christmas at the Kuala Belait R.C. School/Church

Group photo beside school/church building. Seated from left - Fr. A. Crowther


1939/1940 - The Rectory built by Fr. Crowther

1941 - 1949

1941 to 1945 - All foreign missionaries were interned by the Japanese forces during World War Two. The Church and Rectory were used by the Japanese soldiers but were left in disrepair. A number of the faithful looked after the church as best they could.

Fr. A. Crowther and Fr. Piet de Wit return to Brunei in 1945 and 1947 respectively. Fr. de Wit was appointed the Rector for Kuala Belait/Seria Mission and he set up the Seria English school by arrangement with the British Malayan Petroleum (now Brunei Shell Petroleum) Company. Fr. Crowther was placed in charge of the Mission/School for the State of Brunei.

1949 - Fr. McCarthy was appointed as Rector for Kuala Belait/Seria Mission.

Fr. Piet de Wit with R.C School children in Brunei Town (probably 1941).
1941 - Chapel
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1952 – Brunei became part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Kuching.
- 1953 – Fr. Herman Plattner officially open the church in Kuala Belait.
- 1956 – The Convent in Seria was set up by the Sisters of St. Joseph.
- 1957 – Seria became the head station.
- 1959 (19th Dec.) – The Vicar Apostolic of Miri-Brunei was formed with Bishop Anthony Galvin as Vicar Apostolic.
Early 1950’s – First Holy Communion party in Seria.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

1951 – Fr. Ben Walsh with the FHC candidates
Msgr Buis, Fr. Barry, Fr. Walsh and Fr. Smit - 1952
First extension to St. George’s School – early 50’s
1950 - 1954

The Kuala Belait R.C Church, officially opened Christmas 1953 during the time of Fr. Herman Plat-ter (top left), was later named St. John's.

November 1954 - Kuala Belait R.C Church officially named St. John's and the yet to be built Seria R.C Church named, Church of Our Lady.

1954 - The Seria English School was officially named St. Michael's School.

K. B. AND SERIA R.C. CHURCHES NAMED
The Vicar Apostolic of Kuching, Monseigneur Vos, has agreed that the Roman Catholic Church at Kuala Belait shall come under the Patronage of Saint John the Evangelist. When a new Roman Catholic Church is built at Seria (as part of the Seria/Kuala Belait Mission's plan for erecting a new Seria English School, a convent school, a church and a rectory) it will be known as the Church of Our Lady.

1950 - Fr. Gerard Rottinghuis appointed Principal of Kuala Belait and Seria English Schools.

1952 - Fr. Leo Barry took over as Rector Kuala Belait and Seria Missions.

1954 - Fr. John Maher joined the Seria English School as member of teaching staff and as assistant to the Rector and Seria Missions.
1955 - 1956


November 1955 - Church of Our Lady, Seria under construction.

July 1956 - Church of Our Lady, Seria nearing completion.
1954 - Aerial view of K.B. Town showing St. John's Church (circled top left in picture).

1954 - 1956
28th July, 1956 - Church of Our Lady, Seria blessed and opened by Monseigneur Vos, Vicar Apostolic of Kuching.

November, 1955 - Student’s of St. Michael’s School Seria bid farewell to Fr. G. Rottinghuis.

Franciscan Nuns, Mother Tarcisius and Sister Joseph visited Seria to discuss future of education for Catholic girls.

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KUCHING NUNS HERE FOR S.E.S. TALKS

Two Franciscan Nuns, Mother Tarcisius and Sister Joseph, are visiting Seria/N.S.D. from Kuching to look at educational work in the area, and for talks with the Rector Father Barry, on arrangements for the girls’ section of the new Seria English School.

Mother Tarcisius is the Mother Superior of the Franciscan Nuns in Kuching, an organisation founded towards the end of the last century by Cardinal Vaughan to assist the Mill Hill Fathers with their mission work in Borneo. Sister Joseph is headmistress of St. Theresa’s Convent School Kuching.

Work has already begun on the building of a new Seria English School on a site near Seria Bazaar. When the building is ready, the existing co-educational school will be split into a boys’ section (to be run by Brothers from Kuching) and into a girls’ section to be run by the Franciscan Nuns. Both portions of the school will have facilities for boarding pupils who live in areas too far distant for daily travel.

Mother Tarcisius and Sister Joseph visited Miri yesterday and plan to return to Kuching via Sibu on Monday.

28th July, 1956 - Church of Our Lady, Seria blessed and opened by Monseigneur Vos, Vicar Apostolic of Kuching.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

1956 – newly completed Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, Seria
The opening of the new church, St. George’s Church by Bishop John Vos on Easter Sunday 1957
January 1957 - Fr John Van de Laar appointed Rector and Principal of St John's Church and School.

St. Angela's Convent School for girls officially opened by the British Resident, Mr. D.C. White.

January 1959 - St. Angela's Convent School for girls officially opened.

The British Resident, Mr. D.C. White, visited the new school on Thursday, January 15th, and opened it to the public. The school was built by the British Government and is situated on the edge of the town. It is hoped that the school will provide a good education for the girls who attend it.

Mr. White said that the school was a model for all Christian schools in Brunei. He hoped that it would be a credit to the British Government and to the people of Brunei.

The school has been named after St. Angela, a saint who is regarded as the patron saint of education. The school was opened by the British Resident, Mr. D.C. White, who said that it was a great day for Brunei and for the British Government.

The school is expected to have an enrollment of 500 students, and it is hoped that it will become a model for other schools in Brunei.

The school has a modern building with classrooms, a library, a gym, and a playground. The school is staffed by a team of experienced teachers, and it is hoped that it will provide a good education for the girls who attend it.

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Girls' School Head Answers Charges Of "Excessive Extras"

SERA. — In an effort to instil in the pupils, most of whom had "no respect whatsoever for other people's property," children attending St. Angela's Girls' School have been asked to contribute towards the purchase of cleaning utensils.

This was revealed by Mother John Bosco of St. Angela's this week when she was approached by The Borneo Bulletin to answer charges — made by parents to this newspaper — that, in addition to school fees, local families were being asked to pay "excessive extra charges."

Answering a complaint from one father that each child had been requested to take one yard of calico to school to cover desks, and to provide a feather duster each, Mother John told The Bulletin that this was incorrect.

She said that the new school buildings and furniture were rapidly being spoiled by the children who, though they were clean in their dress, were exceptionally untidy otherwise. This was because that classrooms, the tuck shop and other places were left every day in extremely dirty condition because of the lack of a sense of tidiness in the girls.

As a result, Mother John Bosco said, each child had been asked to cover her desk with half a yard of plastic material. And each class had been asked to provide one dustpan, one small brush and a tin of kerosene oil for cleaning windows — a total cost of about 5 cents each.

The idea, said the Mother Superior, was to try to teach the girls to respect other people's property and to give them a sense of pride in keeping their own school clean and tidy.

Answering another complaint from a father, who said that he had paid school fees of $21 for his three daughters at St. Angela's, but that there had also been extra charges of $3 for the sports fund, $3 for the library and another extra charge for needlework, Mother John explained that if a man had three daughters at the school, full fees were paid for two children and the third was allowed to study at half-fees. If there were additional children, then no fees would be charged at all.

She added that $2 each was being asked for the sports fund, payable in April, and that the sum of $3 asked for the library fund was necessary in order that books which had a heavy debt, might build up a useful store of books for the use of the girls. As far as a charge of $3 for needlework was concerned, Mother Bosco said that this was payable in March, but that if any parent was unable to do so all he had to do was to notify the school authorities and he would receive sympathetic consideration.

These charges, it was explained, covered the whole year and were needed in order to provide the facilities which the school itself could not provide out of its own funds for the advancement of the girls in several spheres.

BELAIT CATHOLICS HONOURED

Two prominent members of the Belait Catholic community were honoured last Sunday at a dinner party held in the grounds of St. Michael's Church and Presbytery, Seria. They were the Rev. Father J. Maher, who celebrated 25 years of teaching in the United Kingdom, Sarawak and Brunei, and Mr. G.W.P. Clark, a retired Brunei Shell Petroleum Co., Ltd. employee and now a member of the Public Works Department in Belait, whose work as a layman on behalf of the Catholic Church was rewarded by the presentation to him of the Papal medal, Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice. These Bulletin pictures show (top) Father Maher being congratulated by Mr. Stanley Fernando, who organised the Rev. Father's work at St. Michael's School, Seria, on behalf of the Catholic community, and (lower) Mrs. Clark being congratulated by Bishop Vos after his presentation of the Papal medal to Mr. Clark, standing next to his wife, The Rev. Father, Mr. D. C. White, and Mrs. R. E. Hale, wife of the missionaries director of the Brunei Shell Petroleum Co., attended the function.

Belait Catholics Honoured

July 1959 - (Top right) Fr. John Maher honoured during celebration of his 25 years as a teacher.

(Right) Mr. G.W.P. Clark receives Papal medal, Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice (pictured with his wife).

Presentations made by Bishop Vos at St. Michael's Presbytery, Seria.

February 1959 - Mother John Bosco of St. Angela's Convent School answers parents' complaints of "excessive extras"
June 1959 - Brunei Government withdrew financial grants and feeding scheme from all Mission Schools in the State.

1960 - 1970

BRUNEI GOVERNMENT TO END GRANTS TO MISSION SCHOOLS

Decision Based On Religious Grounds

BRUNEI TOWN. — The present small financial grants made by the Brunei government to Christian mission schools in the state will be discontinued January 1 next, according to a notification from the British Resident, Mr. D.C. White, received by principals of the schools last week-end.

The decision was made by the Sultan in Council on the ground that, as Brunei was a Muslim state, it would not be proper for the government to continue its support of Christian educational establishments.

Seven schools will be affected by the decision, two in Brunei Town and five in the Seria-Berait field area. They are:

- St. Michael's (Catholic) secondary school, Seria.
- St. Angela's (Catholic) girls' school, Seria.
- St. Margaret's (Anglican) school, Seria.
- St. John's (Catholic) school, Kudat Belait.
- St. Philip's and St. James' (Anglican) school, Kudat Belait.
- St. George's (Catholic) school, Brunei Town.
- St. Andrew's (Anglican) school, Brunei Town.

All these schools are, at present, receiving financial grants from the government which cover one third of the monthly cost of teachers' salaries.

OLD MISSION SCHOOLS

Chinese schools in the state, which receive a 50 cent grant per month from the government, will not be affected by the decision of the Sultan in Council to stop monetary assistance to the mission schools.

One result of the government action, missionary sources said this Brunei Bulletin this week, would be an unavoidable increase in school fees next year in order that teachers' salaries could be maintained at present level.

A suggestion had been made, it was stated, that the government would be willing to take over the mission schools and run them as non-Christian educational institutions. This would certainly not be acceptable by the mission authorities. The Bulletin was informed that the present Muslim children were, at present, attending mission schools in Brunei, some of them the sons and daughters of government officials, who had been advised by the state authorities that there were not enough places for Malay-primarv-
school graduates in the government English schools, and that entry should be sought to the Christian schools.

A Muslim parent, who did not wish to be quoted by name, said that he had children attending a mission school. He was more than satisfied with the education they were receiving, but he felt that the decision of the Sultan in Council would force him to remove his children from their present school in order “that I should not commit a sin against the Muslim faith.”

A result of the ruling, Brunei will stand alone in this part of the world in ending support to mission schools. Both North Borneo and Sarawak gave financial grants to Christian educational institutions, and the Federation of Malaya, another Muslim state, has continued its financial contributions to these schools since independence was obtained from the United Kingdom.

In some cases, principals of mission schools in the Federation receive a personal grant of $500 a month in addition to a general contribution to the school.

In Sarawak, the salaries of mission-school teachers are fully paid by the colonial government.

St. Michael's, which is the senior institution affected by the decision, is the only secondary school up to Senior Cambridge level in the Seria-Berait area. The school gained a 100 per cent pass record in the public school examination, easily besting the government-run Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin College, Brunei Town.

The Bulletin was informed that the present Muslim population, consisting of about 14,000 persons, are, at present, attending mission schools in Brunei. The decision of the Sultan in Council will force them to remove their children from their present school in order “that I should not commit a sin against the Muslim faith.”

Letters To The Editor (Contd.)

A MUSLIM CONDEMS BRUNEI ON SCHOOL POLICY

Dear Editor,

I believe that the recent decision to stop monetary aid to Christian mission schools by the Brunei government was meant to implement the state's Islamic policy.

Isko Yassin tells me that there is no single doctrine, either drawn from the Holy Qur'an or the traditions (Hadiths), which can support such an action. If the subsidies were withdrawn, religious grounds the action of the authorities is untenable.

The Holy Qur'an does not sanction any act which a prejudicial to any section of the community. On the contrary, the whole tenor of the Qu'ranic teachings forbids any discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims in the eyes of the law. The Holy Qur'an expressly lays down that there is no compulsion in religion: “(2:256) be-cause all religions are for God” (2:256). It is up to the individual whether to believe or not to believe as the question of faith is a private matter between him and his Creator (18:29).

As far as the state is concerned, it is its duty to see that justice and peace is maintained between its subjects, regardless of birth, race, colour or creed. The liberty of the conscience of the individual must be safeguarded at all costs. The state has to resort to war, it needs be, in order to maintain this freedom: “(2:255) and fight with them until there is no more persecution and all religions are for God” (chapter 2, verse 25).

An injunction in the Holy Qur'an to protect places of worship does not only mean an order to the Muslim to keep the mosque in safe condition, but also entails a duty on all Muslims to protect from destruction the “cathedrals and churches and synagogues” in the place of worship that those places were still in existence.

The practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad further points to the fact that the religion he preached demands no distinction between a Muslim and non-Muslim being given to non-Muslims including Christian missionaries, a point on which God has given at this time the Government of the world, do not persecute the Christian religion, on the contrary, they favor it, honour our priests and saints of the Lord and confer benefits on churches and monasteries.”

The Muslim states of Hyderabad and Bhopal, both in India, used to, if they do not still, grant ample subsidies to Christian, Hindu and Zoroastrian priests in their states.

A Muslim state, far from being forbidden to extend help to non-Muslim subjects, is in fact encouraged to render all aid it can.

In Muhammadan law, a non-Muslim is not debarred from receiving benefits under a “Wakf” if the state of Brunei claims to discontinue her subsidies to mission schools on the ground of enforcing religious policy, while Malaya and Sarawak continue granting subsidies to their mission schools, then I would contend that Sarawak and Malaya are pursuing the orthodox religious policy of Islam and Brunei has been misled by un-Islamic fanaticism.

Yours etc.,

A TRUE MUSLIM:

“TAMA PEJUANGGA”

August 1959 - An opinion on the Brunei Government's decision to withdraw financial grants and funding scheme from all Mission Schools in the State.
January 1966 - Bro. Anthony Lee was ordained to the priesthood by the Vicar Apostolic, Rt. Rev. Anthony Galvin, at St. Joseph’s Church in Miri. Bro. Anthony was the first boy from the Miri Vicariate to become a Roman Catholic priest. Top right - Pictured with his family after his ordination.

THE BORNEO BULLETIN, November 2, 1968

Priest ends 38 Borneo years

Fr. John Van de Laar, with Fr. Peter Chung, who has succeeded him as rector of the Kuala Belait Catholic parish. Fr. Chung was born and educated in China, which he left just before the Communist takeover. He was ordained in Kuching in 1954, after which he became assistant priest, Miri. He served in Sarawak, Sibu and Miri again for four years before he was sent to Rome for further studies in 1963. He returned in 1966 with a doctorate in church law and since then has been rector of the Mill Hill seminary in Miri—Bulletin picture.

November 1968 - Fr. John Van de Laar departed from Brunei after serving for 38 years in Borneo. Fr. Peter Chung, now Archbishop of Kuching, took over as rector of St. John’s.

February 1968 - Fr. Vincent Cahill arrived from Miri to become principal of St. John’s School. Pictured above is Fr. Cahill (centre left) with Fr. Van de Laar (centre right) and St. John’s School teachers.

Feb 1968 - Fr. Van de Laar returned to Kuala Belait after 6 months’ leave to the Netherlands, during which he underwent an eye operation.

July 1970 - Before his departure from Brunei, Fr. Leo Barry celebrated the 40th Anniversary of his priestly ordination. The occasion was held at the Church of Our Lady, Seria. Fr. Barry was one of the longest serving missionaries in Borneo.

1960 - 1970

One of the longest serving priests in East Malaysia and Brunei, Fr. Leo John Barry, 65, parish priest at Seria, celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination on Sunday.

Bishop Reiterer, Vicar Apostolic of Kuching, and 20 fellow priests, 10 of them from Sarawak, attended a sung Latin mass at the Church of Our Lady, Seria. Fr. Barry particularly asked for a Latin mass, now rarely used by the Roman Catholic Church which has introduced a new form of vernacular mass. He said: “I think it will be the last time Latin mass will be used in Seria, but it is the one I am used to.”

Fr. Barry was ordained at Mill Hill, London, in 1931, after attending the Jesuit College, Stamford Hill, and was sent out to Sarawak where he spent 18 months teaching at St. Joseph’s School, Kuching.

He spent a further year at Binatang and was then posted to Kanowit where he stayed until 1952, except for the Japanese occupation when he was interned at Batai Lintang camp.

Many of the priests at Sunday’s celebration first met Fr. Barry at Kanowit because new priests arriving in Sarawak were sent to Kanowit to learn Iban and the local way of life.

In 1952 Fr. Barry was posted to Kuala Belait and has stayed in the Belait district since then. He was due to fly off for two months’ leave in Britain on Thursday. “I’m hoping to catch the one good day of the British summer,” he said, but he will return to Sarawak in October.

“If I may retire at the end of the year,” he said, “I’ve been here 20 years and I feel it’s about time some young blood was brought in.”

“There is a shortage of priests and I can always find something to do if I don’t retire, but I feel it would be a job elsewhere than Seria.”

1960 - 1970
May 1966 - St. John’s School (West Wing) opened by Bishop Anthony Galvin (above, above right and right). (Below) New St. John’s School West Wing.

The $80,000 St. John’s Secondary School at Kuala Belait, was opened last weekend by Bishop Anthony Galvin, Vicar Apostolic of Miri, seen above cutting the ribbon. With him is Father Van der Laar.

The Bishop blessed the building and told the gathering that it was the duty of parents and citizens to protect and guard the interest of their children.

They should be proud that St. John’s had a new building in which their children could attend secondary classes.

Bishop Galvin thanked the contractor, Mr. Michael Lau, for his splendid work in completing the building on schedule, and the donors whose contributions made it possible.

The list of donors will be published next week.

May 1966 - St. John’s School (West Wing) opened by Bishop Anthony Galvin (above, above right and right). (Below) New St. John’s School West Wing.

1960 - 1970


Father Michael Gill, 26, has arrived from the London headquarters of the Mill Hill mission to join the staff of St. John’s School, Kuala Belait. He comes from County Longford, Ireland.

Fr. Gill has a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from University College of Dublin. He was ordained as a priest last year.

The Rev. Father H. Brentjens has arrived in Kuala Belait from Miri to become principal of St. John’s School. In Miri he was secretary to the Bishop, the Very Rev. A. D. Galvin, and vice-principal of St. Joseph’s secondary school for a year.

Before that he spent four years in Rotok and three years at Long Akah in Ulu Baran.

While in Miri, he represented the Fourth Division in the Sarawak Cup soccer competition. He has played as centre forward for 22 years but says he is now interested in coaching now.

With Fr. Brentjens arrived in Kuala Belait, Fr. Michael Gill, who recently came from London to teach at St. John’s, has transferred to the staff of St. Michael’s School in Seria.

Students in class at St. John’s School.
March 1967 - Rev. Mother Eamonn (above centre), Mother-General of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph’s, visited St. Angela’s Convent School. School choir (left) performing at concert presented for the Mother-General.


May 1967 - Bishop Galvin ministering Sacrament of Confirmation in Seria, assisted by Fr. M. Gill (L) and Fr. T. Keogan (R). Mrs. Theresa Carrier (L) was sponsor for all the women and girls.

Rev. Mother Eamonn (centre), Mother-General of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph’s, visited St. Angela’s Convent School. Mrs. Theresa Carrier (L) was sponsor for all the women and girls.


“In the last 16 years the number of children in our schools in Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah has doubled,” Mother Eamonn said. “The Franciscan runs have 11 mission houses in the three States. Their main work is in education but they also run hospitals at Penampang, Sabah, and Kanowit, Sarawak. Before coming to Borneo, Mother Eamonn visited mission houses in the Philippines, where Mother Cecilia Mary, who was on the staff of St. Angela’s in Seria until three years ago, is training girls to become members of a new Filipino order of nuns.”

Mother Eamonn’s headquarters is in Stafford, England. The Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph have 59 mission houses in Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United States, Africa, Brunei, East Malaysia and the Philippines. She visits every house every six years.

The Superior-General of the Mill Hill missionary, Father G. Mahon, right, with Father John Vandenberge near St. John’s School, Kuala Belait. — Bulletin picture.

KUALA BELAIT. — The tradition of peaceful living among Sarawak’s different communities has been the gentle impression gained by the Superior-General of the Mill Hill missionaries, Father G. Mahon, who is now visiting East Malaysia and Brunei.

Father Mahon worked for eight years as a missionary in East Africa and has visited the Congo and West Africa, North and South Korea, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. He said:

“I have never found friendly or more cooperative people than those I met in Sarawak. I was told when I flew here from Mill Hill, England, that I would be received with open arms and welcomed in the different areas. “When else in the world could you find in one place 15 different languages spoken? I met the Sarawak Education Department official who has 20,000 pupils in his care and every week he has to deal with 250 new cases. He has to do this because the language of instruction here is only English and there are many children learning the different dialects.”

One of Father Mahon’s duties is to assist the St. Joseph’s Missionary Society of Mill Hill, London — to give in its current style — that he uses to understand their culture and customs of the natives, which he door-to-door every week.

Sarawak’s racial harmony impresses mission head.

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Sarawak’s racial harmony impresses mission head.

KUALA BELAIT. — The tradition of peaceful living among Sarawak’s different communities has been the gentle impression gained by the Superior-General of the Mill Hill missionaries, Father G. Mahon, who is now visiting East Malaysia and Brunei.

Father Mahon worked for eight years as a missionary in East Africa and has visited the Congo and West Africa, North and South Korea, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. He said:

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January 1970 - The first person to be ordained to the priesthood in Brunei was Bro. Peter Tann. The ordination was ministered by Bishop Anthony Galvin at the Church of Our Lady in Seria.

1970 - (Top) Bishop Anthony Galvin blesses the site for the new St. John’s church.

- (Right) Bishop Galvin assisted by Fr. Peter Chung during blessing of site for new church.

1960 - 1970

Fr. Paul Tong with first Holy Communicants.

October 1970 - (left) Fr. Chung’s farewell at St. John’s.

November 1970 - (above) Fr. Chung’s episcopal consecration as Co-adjutor-Bishop, conducted in Kota Kinabalu, by Bishop James Buis of Sabah and Bishop Tong of Penang. Fr. Paul Tong succeeded Fr. Chung as Rector of St. John’s.

December 1970 - Bishop Anthony Galvin blesses the site for the new St. John’s church.

- (Right) Bishop Galvin assisted by Fr. Peter Chung during blessing of site for new church.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

Bishop Galvin officiating at the opening ceremony of the new Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in August 1969
Bishop Galvin officiating the opening ceremony of COLA in August, 1969
Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Bandar Seri Begawan

Then (1969?)
12th March, 1972 - The new St. John's Church was blessed and officially opened by Bishop Anthony Galvin.

1971 - The new St. John's Church under construction.

1971 - 1980
1971 - 1985

1972 - (Above) The newly completed St. John’s Church. (Right) Fr. Paul Tong pictured outside newly completed church.

June 1973 - Bishop Van C. Melkebeke (Apostolic Visitor) with Fr. Tong and Fr. Peter Chiang after conferring sacrament of confirmation at St. John’s.

1980 - Bishop Anthony Lee with Fr. Tong conferring sacrament of confirmation at St. John’s.

circa 1979 - First Holy Communion in front of the school.

Fr. Tong with First Holy Communicants. Recognise anyone?

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05th June, 1983 - Fr. Tong celebrated 25 years of priesthood.

22nd Oct, 1978 - St. John’s School East Wing officially opened by Bishop Anthony Lee.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1976 – Brunei became part of the Diocese of Miri-Brunei
- 1989 – Fr. Cornelius Sim was ordained by Bishop Anthony Lee in Seria
- 1991 – Departure* of Fr. Chiang and Fr. McClorey
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

Jan 1970 – first person to be ordained to the priesthood in Brunei. Brother Peter Tann.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

1972 – the newly completed St. John’s Church
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

12th March 1972 – new St John Church was blessed and officially opened by Bishop Anthony Galvin
30th November 1985 – Rev. Ivan Fang ordained to the priesthood
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1991 - Two foreign Catholic nuns, Sr. Celestine Ho, principal of St. Angela’s Girls School in Seria and Sr Eamonn Chan, a teacher at the same school, return to Malaysia on Feb 18 and Feb 24 respectively.
March, 1987 - Fr. Paul Tong departed from Brunei after serving as the rector of St. John’s for almost seventeen years. In the absence of a resident priest, the church appointed two lay persons, Bros. Richard Fun and Lawrence Carrier, to serve in some of the work of the ministerial priesthood. In addition Bro. David Teo was entrusted by Fr. John McClorey, the parish priest of Seria, with the pastoral aspect of the church.

1988 - Bro. Cornelius Sim was assigned to administer St. John’s Parish on completion of his priestly training in the United States. He was ordained a Deacon at St. John’s by Bishop Anthony Lee on 31st May, 1989. On 26th November, 1989, Bro. Sim was ordained a priest Bishop Lee at the Church of Our Lady, Seria.

1989 - Bro. Cornelius ordained by Bishop Lee (left). Fr. Cornelius after his priestly ordination (right).

31st May, 1989 - Bro. Cornelius Sim was ordained a Deacon by Bishop Lee (above right) at St. John’s. Pictured with Fr. Chiang and Fr. McClorey (above left).


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By the end of February 1991, the remaining priests, Fr. Peter Chiang and Fr. John McClorey, departed from Brunei. Fr. Cornelius was left to minister to the three parishes of Seria, K.B and Bandar, until Fr. Ivan Fang returned to serve in Bandar in December 1992.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1992 – Fr Ivan Fang MHM appointed as parish priest to Church of Our Lady of Assumption
Several projects to upgrade the church and rectory were undertaken in the last 10 years during the rectorship of Fr. Sim.

1988 - The Eucharistic Chapel was completed. It was officially opened in December, 1988 by Fr. McClorey.

1992 - Extension work to the rectory started in July, 1992. It was completed in 1993 and officially opened by His Grace Archbishop Alberto Tricarico, Apostolic Delegate, during his visit to St. John’s on 05th June, 1993. The extension included a new air-conditioned Parish Hall.

1994 - Old store was renovated into rector’s office.

1996 - Extension to the rear of the rectory into St. John’s Library was completed in 1996.
Milestones in the Brunei church history - continue

- 1997 – Establishment of the Apostolic Prefecture of Brunei Darussalam
- 1998 – Msgr. Cornelius Sim was installed as Apostolic Prefect of Brunei Darussalam
- 1999 – Fr. Paul Shie was ordained by Bishop Anthony Lee in Bandar Seri Begawan
- 2003 – Fr. Robert Leong was ordained by Bishop Anthony Lee in Kuala Belait
Establishment of the Prefecture

On 22nd of February 1998, by the grace of God, the Catholic Church in Brunei achieved its autonomous status and declared an Apostolic Prefecture.

Rev. Monsignor Cornelius Sim was installed as the first Prefect Apostolic.
HOT OFF THE PRESS!!

With effect from 06th December, 1997, the Holy See appointed a new Apostolic Prefecture in Brunei Darussalam, with Rt. Rev. Monsignor Cornelius Sim as the first Apostolic Prefect.

Brunei Darussalam — a new Apostolic Prefecture

By Joseph J Masilamany

KUCHING: The Holy See has appointed a new Apostolic Prefecture in Brunei Darussalam with Rt Rev Monsignor Cornelius Sim (pic), as the first Apostolic Prefect.

The Archbishop of Kuching, Datuk Peter Chung was informed of the appointment which takes effect on 6th December 1997 by the Apostolic Nunciature in Bangkok.

Datuk Peter Chung who is also the President of the Bishop’s Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei expressed his heartiest congratulations to the Catholics of Brunei on the constitution of the new Prefecture.

In a letter to Monsignor Cornelius Sim, Datuk Peter Chung welcomed the new Prefecture into the ecclesiastical Province of East Malaysia. He also welcomed the first Apostolic Prefect into the Bishop’s Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

Datuk Peter Chung said the establishment of a new Prefecture is a recognition of the maturity of the Catholic community in Brunei Darussalam by the Holy See.

He said the appointment marks the beginning of a new era for the Catholic community to assume greater responsibility in carrying the mission of Christ in their land.

Addressing the newly appointed Apostolic Prefect, Datuk Peter Chung said, “Your appointment is without doubt an added responsibility on your shoulders. It also means that the Holy See has great confidence in you and recognizes your personal ability and apostolic zeal in leading and serving the new Prefecture in action. With all your people and all those who love you,

I pray that you will have the Holy Spirit to strengthen, guide and protect you in your new responsibility and assure you of my readiness to assist you in your task to set your new Prefecture in action.”

The Church of Brunei Darussalam commenced through the missionary zeal of the Labuan-based Mill Hill Missions Society in the early part of this century. The Church registered its first baptism in 1917 in Brunei Town (now called Bandar Seri Begawan). Its first mission outpost was established in 1927 at Kuala Belait and Fr A Stoter was installed as the first resident priest in 1932.

Today there are three parishes serving three thousand local Catholics and twenty-seven thousand transient workers, most of them being Filipinos and other expatriate workers. In addition there is one Catholic Mission Centre and 4 schools. Two priests are currently serving the Church of Brunei Darussalam assisted by 4 full-time catechists. One woman religious is in formation and two young men are training for the priesthood in Singapore and the United States. In 1985 Fr Ivan Fang MIM was ordained the first local priest.

Monsignor Cornelius Sim was born in 1951 and ordained priest in 1989. He obtained his Masters in Theology from the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio.

- According to Canon Law 371 S 1: an Apostolic Prefecture is a certain portion of the people of God, which for special reasons is not yet constituted a diocese, and which is entrusted to the personal care of a Vicar apostolic or a Prefect apostolic, who governs in the name of the Supreme Pontiff. The title of Prefect apostolic or Vicar apostolic is conferred upon priests who by assignment and under the direct authority of the Holy See, whether they have episcopal consecration or not, govern a missionary district where the hierarchy has not been established.
Ordination of Fr. Paul Shie - 1999
Ordination of Fr. Robert
August 10, 2003
Apostolic Vicariate Established in Brunei

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 20, 2004 (Zenit.org).- John Paul II established the Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei and appointed as its first bishop, Cornelius Sim, a U.S.-educated cleric who's been apostolic prefect in the Southeast Asian sultanate.

The Pope established the Apostolic Prefecture of Brunei in 1997. The vicariate encompasses the sultanate's territory that has some 347,000 inhabitants, the Vatican press office said in its announcement.
Appointment of Bishop Elect Cornelius Sim – October 20th, 2004

[Image of the document with Latin text]
Ordination of Bishop Cornelius Sim
January 21, 2005
Saddest Moment of the School

- 2006 – St. Michael School closes at the end of December 2006
- 2007 – St. Angela’s School became co-ed beginning January 2007
Ordination of Rev. Arin Augustine Sugit on December 8, 2008
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THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM TODAY

Church of Our Lady of the Assumption

St. John’s Church

Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, Seria
The 5th Anniversary of Brunei Prefecture (2004).
The 10th Anniversary of Apostolic Vicariate (21.1.2015)
COOL 60th Anniversary – Dec. 8th, 2015

1st Holy Communion

Confirmation
End of Presentation