

The following paper, written in April 2024, captures the dynamic nature of the mission field. Although some specifics have changed since its writing, the content remains highly relevant and worthy of consideration.



Reformed Ministries PNG

The Free Reformed Churches have been supporting mission work in Papua New Guinea since the 1980s. As sending church, the FRC Southern River relies on the support of cooperating churches to ensure this work can continue. To give you a missionary's perspective on the work done in PNG, the Southern River Mission Board asked those on the field to present various aspects of mission work in Papua New Guinea. It is Southern River's hope that these articles will increase your understanding of what is involved in mission work in PNG.

Overview of Reformed Ministries

Pastor R. De Jonge (missionary)

Reformed mission work began in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the 1980s, but it has significantly increased since 2000. In the past 20 years, several missionaries have been sent from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, all working together in PNG under the umbrella of "Reformed Ministries."

Currently, two families are working at the Reformed Churches Bible College (RCBC) in Port Moresby, one supported by Canada and the other by New Zealand. They will soon be joined by Pastor Tim Slaa, another missionary, supported by Australia, who will live at the RCBC but focus on church planting. Three families live in Ukaruampa, Eastern Highlands, and focus on church planting in Eastern Highlands and Morobe provinces.

In 2019, Reformed Ministries, with the approval of the supporting mission boards, developed a 10-year plan for their work in PNG. This plan included the following mission and vision:

Mission: *Our mission is to encourage, assist, and equip the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea to (1) grow in maturity and (2) spread the Reformed faith.*

Vision: *"30/30:" By 2030, we plan to have 5 instituted churches, 10 church plants, and 15 national pastors.*

In addition to this mission and vision, they adopted an operational and working strategic plan that they pray and work earnestly to complete. They hold yearly conferences to discuss their progress, make plans for the next year, and offer prayer and encouragement for each other. Currently, there are two instituted

for each other. Currently, there are two instituted churches, five church plants, and five national pastors. Their goals were and remain lofty, and the results are in the hands of the Lord, but Reformed Ministries and their boards continue to pray that the Lord of the harvest will bless their labours (Matt 9:38).

Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea

As stated in their mission statement, Reformed Ministries works with the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea. Here is a brief synopsis of each of the churches and church plants:

In the Port Moresby and Central Province region, there are four churches: one instituted church and three church plants.

Bethel Reformed Church of Beretete is a small but stable congregation that is served by Pastor Nawai, who was ordained in 2016. In 2023, in its 30th year of existence, the Beretete congregation was instituted. This congregation is well-grounded in the truth of the Reformed confession and is growing in their desire to reach out to their neighbouring communities with the gospel.

Covenant Reformed Church of 9-Mile is one of the larger RCPNG congregations, served by Pastor Aisi Kosa since his ordination in 2016. In recent years, this congregation has swelled in size and recently constructed a new church building to accommodate for these numbers and the fact that they are running a small school on the property as well.

Immanuel Reformed Church of East Boroko is a very small congregation tucked away in a settlement in the East Boroko area of Port Moresby. In recent years there has been growth in



**Installation of Pastor Pol and Pastor DeJonge
Living Waters Reformed Church, Lae 2022**

membership, leadership, and commitment in recent years, and the congregation is highly motivated to continue worshipping in their settlement and reaching out to their neighbours with the Word of God.

Veifa'a Reformed Church is a small village congregation 4 hours drive from Port Moresby. Pastor Paul Ame has served the congregation since his ordination in 2020. Although the congregation is small, they have amazingly produced three of the five pastors of the RCPNG. Like the Immanuel Reformed Church, Veifa'a has been challenged by its small size, yet by the Lord's grace, the faithful presence and preaching of their pastor is proving to be a blessing for the congregation and providing much-needed leadership and stability.

There are three RCPNG churches (one instituted, two church plants) in Morobe and Eastern Highlands. Mountains separate this region from Port Moresby, but the Highlands Highway connects all three of these churches and offers a gateway further into the highly populated Highlands region.

The Living Water Reformed Church in Lae is served by Pastor Isidore Aufa. Pastor Isidore was ordained in 2017, and the church instituted in 2019. Even though they struggle in many ways; they are in a rough neighbourhood and many members live day-to-day by selling garden food, they remain one of the largest and strongest RCPNG churches.

The Logos Reformed in Wantun is served by Pastor Tony O. Aufa, also ordained in 2017. Wantun is a younger church and newer to Reformed faith and life. As a village church, their life is much different than Lae's. Despite challenges related to being cash-poor and new to the Reformed faith, they are growing in maturity, having recently appointed three new candidate leaders in the church.

The Hila Reformed Church is the youngest of all the RCPNG congregations. They started holding worship services in 2020. Although very young, it is a very dynamic congregation. They have a solid core of committed members and visitors coming to worship weekly. There is also much interest in Reformed doctrine in the area, thanks to the active and vocal witness of our members and the frequent outreaches that have happened at local markets over the past several years.

Zeal for Outreach

The desire to impact their communities with the truth of God's Word is very strong in the RCPNG congregations and pastors. Pastors will go on multi-day preaching expeditions, congregation members will hike for hours to reach neighbouring villages, and whole congregations will walk into nearby settlements to share the good news.

As missionaries, we also exert a lot of effort in outreach. Much of this is done in the areas of our local congregations, and we urge people to go and worship with them on Sundays. A significant amount is also done in areas where we believe there is potential for a Reformed Church in the future. The more we do outreach, the more people learn to value and trust the message that we are bringing, and the more we receive invitations to preach in local villages, help local pastors to preach reach their communities effectively, and get queried about the potential of starting a Reformed church in a certain area. While we cannot fulfill all these requests, we do what we can and are encouraged by the way the Lord opens doors for Christ-centered preaching and Reformed church planting.



**Pastor Ryan DeJonge and family have been
in PNG since 2016**

Papua New Guinea

B. Van De Kamp (mission support worker)

Papua New Guinea, located just above the northern tip of Queensland, occupies the Eastern half of the island of New Guinea as well as some 600 islands. The western half of the island, West Papua, is a province of Indonesia.

Papua New Guinea became an independent nation from Australia in 1975. It is considered a developing country; its largest economic sectors being agriculture, forestry, and fishing. The government of the country continues to struggle in managing the economy, dealing with corruption, and maintaining law and order. In 2020, it was reported that Australia was the biggest provider of aid and investment to PNG, however China is gradually increasing their involvement in Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is the most linguistically and culturally diverse country in the world, with over 800 languages still being spoken to one degree or another, with as many distinct cultures as there are languages. English is the language used by the government, courts, and education system, however Tok Pisin (Pidgin) is the most widely spoken language.

Around 80% of the population lives in rural areas. Many people who live isolated in interior mountainous region are completely dependant on subsistence farming, and a large percentage of the population is 'self employed,' growing food to meet their basic needs, and selling some of their surplus produce for their income to purchase medication, store food, pay school fees and so on.

The vast majority of the people in PNG (close to 95 percent) of people consider themselves Christians. While it is true that Christianity has had an impact on a lot of the people of PNG, the traditional (animistic) religious beliefs still have a strong hold on most of the population. There is also a lot of false 'gospel' that has been spread around the country.

One of the joys of the people of PNG, is their strong family culture and their connection to their 'land'. Traditional land ownership



(97% of the country) is passed from fathers to sons (in some areas, mothers to daughters), through the generations, with families living in their home village with their clans. If they do move away to cities or other areas for work reasons, they maintain a strong connection to their home village, with the expectation that they will retire, die and be buried there. Marriage (bride price) and death (haus krai) are significant events in the life of a Papua New Guinean, and have strong cultural practices associated with each.

Common struggles in the life of a Papua New Guinean are tribal violence, domestic violence, sexual violence and accusations of sorcery. These issues are widespread, and demonstrate that most are nominally Christian. Alongside these cultural issues, are the struggles in affording adequate nutritionally-balanced food and accessing quality healthcare and education.

For the Reformed Churches of PNG, one of the struggles is material poverty, which impacts on their ability to support the 'running' of a church and the stipend of a pastor. The conundrum for assisting nationals with outside support (especially financial) is whether or not the support given will be a hindrance or stumbling block to the church. As much as possible ownership should be promoted, but when working with materially poor people this remains a big challenge.

Because families are very close knit, the pressure of family members is also strong. When biblical principles and family obligations clash, sometimes the family obligations will still take precedence. For example, if there is an election for office bearers, the family members of a brother who is standing for election may feel strongly that they need to vote for him, not because he best meets the biblical qualities of an elder, but because they have family ties.

As missionaries, living and working in PNG, life has many joys but also struggles. A great joy is the PNG people's general friendliness and respect towards missionaries. When outreach preaching at the market, many people will stop going about their daily business, sit down and listen as the gospel is proclaimed!





Market preaching is one of the key outreach tools used by Reformed Ministries

Often afterwards people will stop to purchase a drink or give some food to the pastor when they appreciate what he has shared. Another great joy is when missionaries are able to see some of the fruits of their labour. Many times, in church planting work, we see 2 steps forward, and 1 step back again. Ultimately there is joy in knowing that as we work faithfully, the LORD is the one who changes hearts and will bring in His sheep in His own timing.

Since the “harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,” there is always more that can be done in God’s Kingdom building work. There is often a ‘temptation’ to do more, but one needs to consider his or her abilities and limits. When 2 or more missionaries are working side by side, the workload is shared, and there is companionship and support for each other, the burdens are lessened.

Papua New Guinea is a country in need of the gospel! And it is our privilege to be able to serve here and see God’s hand at work.



Ben and Merinda Van de Kamp have been in PNG as support workers since 2020

Considering a Call to PNG

Pastor T. Slaa (missionary)

Approximately one year ago the Southern River Mission Board reached out to my wife and I to gauge our receptiveness to a call to foreign mission in Papua New Guinea. There were many conversations with the board and mission personnel in the following months, as well as much personal reflection and prayer. Ultimately this communication led to a call in June, a visit to the field in July, and finally clarity and peace from the Lord to accept that call in early August. I’d like to share some of the reasons why the Lord led us to accept this call, with the hope that our reflections will give some insight into the work that’s being done in PNG.

First, given how recently I graduated from Seminary, it was important to us that the mission would be well established in whatever field we accepted and that there would be much experience between the board and current missionaries. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that given the length of time that the Free Reformed Churches have been working in PNG there’s great potential to continue to build off the foundation of the collective wisdom that’s been gained. This was clear to us in our communications and visit to the field, as well as with the cooperation we could see between the mission boards in Canada and New Zealand who are also working in PNG. While of course this experience and collective wisdom will be of great benefit to us as we look to take up our work there soon, we also strongly feel that this foundation that’s been built over these years is all the more reason for Southern River’s work there to continue and expand.

Secondly, it quickly became clear to us during our visit that the current national pastors in the Reformed Churches of PNG also have a lot of wisdom and experience between them. While they are still few in number, there is much promise and potential for the RCPNG due to their leadership. Someday, the Lord willing, there will be plenty more capable pastors within the RCPNG so that Southern River can increasingly turn the work over to the nationals. But at the moment there is still a lot of work to be done and a great need for the support of the Free Reformed Churches. For myself, it was cause for much encouragement and excitement to see the capable work of men like Pastor Nawai and Pastor Aisi and Pastor Paul in the churches around Port Moresby. This allows us as missionaries to work very effectively *alongside* the national pastors as we seek to spread the Gospel in PNG.

Third, and related to what has already been said, it became clear to us that the RCPNG is at a critical stage right now. As the Bible College in Port Moresby grows and the missionaries who serve there as instructors become increasingly busy with that specific work, it was apparent to us the great need for missionaries to specifically work alongside the national pastors around Port Moresby, much like is being done in the NE by Pastor Ryan and Pastor David. There is of course much reason to give thanks to the Lord for the way the college and churches have grown over the decades, but it also means that mission efforts will require *more* investment by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia before these efforts can begin to be scaled back and ultimately turned over to the nationals.

Finally, as we communicated with the missionaries past and present and as we visited the churches and communities around Port Moresby, the Lord made very clear to us the incredible need for the Gospel in Papua New Guinea. There is much brokenness and confusion due to syncretistic and mistaken beliefs about Christianity. But deeper than that, we also recognized that there is a unique window of opportunity right now in PNG. Many Western vices like its materialism have not yet penetrated deeply into the culture, especially outside the immediate city limits of Port Moresby. This means that PNG is a culture and society that is still very ready to listen to the Gospel preaching. There are ears to hear right now and a culture that desires to hear the *truth* from God's Word, rather than a twisted version that brings fear rather than peace. So "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14-15). Given the Western world's increasing efforts to influence and exploit the resource-rich nation of Papua New Guinea, it's clear that this is an opportunity that will not always remain. The harvest is plentiful and there is a unique opportunity for the Free Reformed Churches to work at that harvest right now. With a small base of healthy leadership in place in the RCPNG and an experienced mission board and team, now is not the time to pull back but to build on the gains that have been made and from the growth that God has granted.

For these reasons my wife and I were blessed with peace and clarity as to where God was leading us. We tremble at the task that lies ahead because what is man in the face of so many lost and of such darkness? But we are also excited to begin our work there because we also see that the Lord Jesus and his Spirit are clearly at work in PNG. So may God continue to receive all glory and honour until the fullness of his kingdom comes, wherein he shall be all in all!



Pastor Tim and Alana Slaa will be arriving in PNG DV 28 March 2024

A Battle of Influences

Pastor D. Pol (missionary)

In Papua New Guinea, relationship is everything. When the wheels of relationship are greased by money or fear, the effects of it are compounded and even a person who is more distantly connected can have an outsized impact on a community. There are several denominations that have made serious headway on this front.

The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church is one of the most aggressive church denominations in this respect. They come with much in the way of funds and promises, especially regarding building a new church in a community. They are also backed by very wealthy companies whose sole purpose is to extend the impact of the SDA Church. With the carrot of financing and the stick of hellfire, whole churches are flipping in PNG and the SDA church is spreading like wildfire. In our most recent outreach tour in Lae it was very difficult to find a place to preach, as in nearly every market place, first thing in the morning until later in the day, SDA preachers, street preachers and their missionaries were promoting their false gospel.

However, it is not just the SDA church. The tradition and cultural **Catholicism** is so deeply embedded in certain communities that it becomes almost impossible to make headway there. Families are very reluctant to let their cousins, uncles and aunts leave "the church" even if they haven't been practicing members for years.

Prosperity churches have been spreading rapidly as well. However, their brand involves very little gospel as well. If you follow the law and if you give money to the church, you will be blessed in this life. Give 1,000 kina and you will get 10,000.

If you haven't received anything, you just haven't sacrificed enough in true faith yet, so give more to the pastor! Nothing is said of the sanctifying role of suffering or how God has even the worst of experiences in his hands. Many become jaded, cynical and fall away from Christianity altogether, as they've "tried it" and found it only impoverished them.

So, what can Reformed Ministries do?

One way is by making the most of where we, in the North East are established, In Ukarumpa, run by SIL (the organisation of Wycliffe Bible Translators) we have been blessed to have a tremendous influence. Many of these translators are eagerly looking forward to finishing their Bible translations and enjoying the fruit of their labours. However, some have come to the realization that they are close to finishing, but have no churches in their area to actually preach the Word faithfully. As that is the case, some are very interested in partnering with us, mainly through the Bible College (RCBC).

How?

We have set up a scholarship fund for SIL. National assistants to the translators who are generally better educated, who love the Word of God and who are motivated to see the gospel spread are welcomed to apply. With God's blessing, we envision these relationships resulting in the true Gospel reaching to every corner of PNG, wherever a Bible is being translated. Our first applicant who is now at the college.

We understand this is not the only solution, but it is one of many avenues that we are pursuing. With the blessing of funds and the growth of the work we have been able to do thus far, we've still been able to have a tremendous impact on Papua New Guinea and we pray that this is only the beginning for the Reformed Churches of PNG.



Pastor David and Erika Pol began their work in PNG in 2022

Reformed Churches Bible College (RCBC) Mark Mulder (principal)



Work has commenced on a home for the Slaa family at RCBC in Port Moresby

The RCBC (Reformed Churches Bible College) was established in 2007 in recognition of the fact that, for the reformed churches to grow, leaders needed to be trained. A 2-year certificate program was established, which was followed by a 3-year diploma program. In the certificate program students work their way through the bible and the Heidelberg catechism over a 2-year period. They are also taught English (the required language of instruction) and cover 12 other modules of learning covering topics such as *Christian Marriage and Family Life, Parenting, Church History, Churches in PNG, Church Ministry, Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Leadership, Public Speaking, Peace Building, Health and Hygiene*. If they complete the certificate course at a high enough level, students may enter the diploma program, which is very much focussed on 'producing' pastors. Courses such as *Old Testament and New Testament exegesis, Old and New Testament Survey, Apologetics, Dogmatics, Symbolics, Church Liturgy, Ethics, Missiology*, to name a few, are very academically demanding, and so only the very best manage to graduate from this course.

The mission statement of the RCBC is "Prepare God's people for works of service", and so we also require the students to work on the college grounds assisting in small projects and establishing and maintaining gardens to help the college become self-sustainable. The college currently 'runs' a poultry project, raising chickens and selling them as meat birds, and a pig project, breeding pigs and selling the litter. The RCBC recognises that