


**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
MICRONESIA**

***HISTORICAL ESSAYS
ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE CAROLINE-MARSHALL
ISLANDS***

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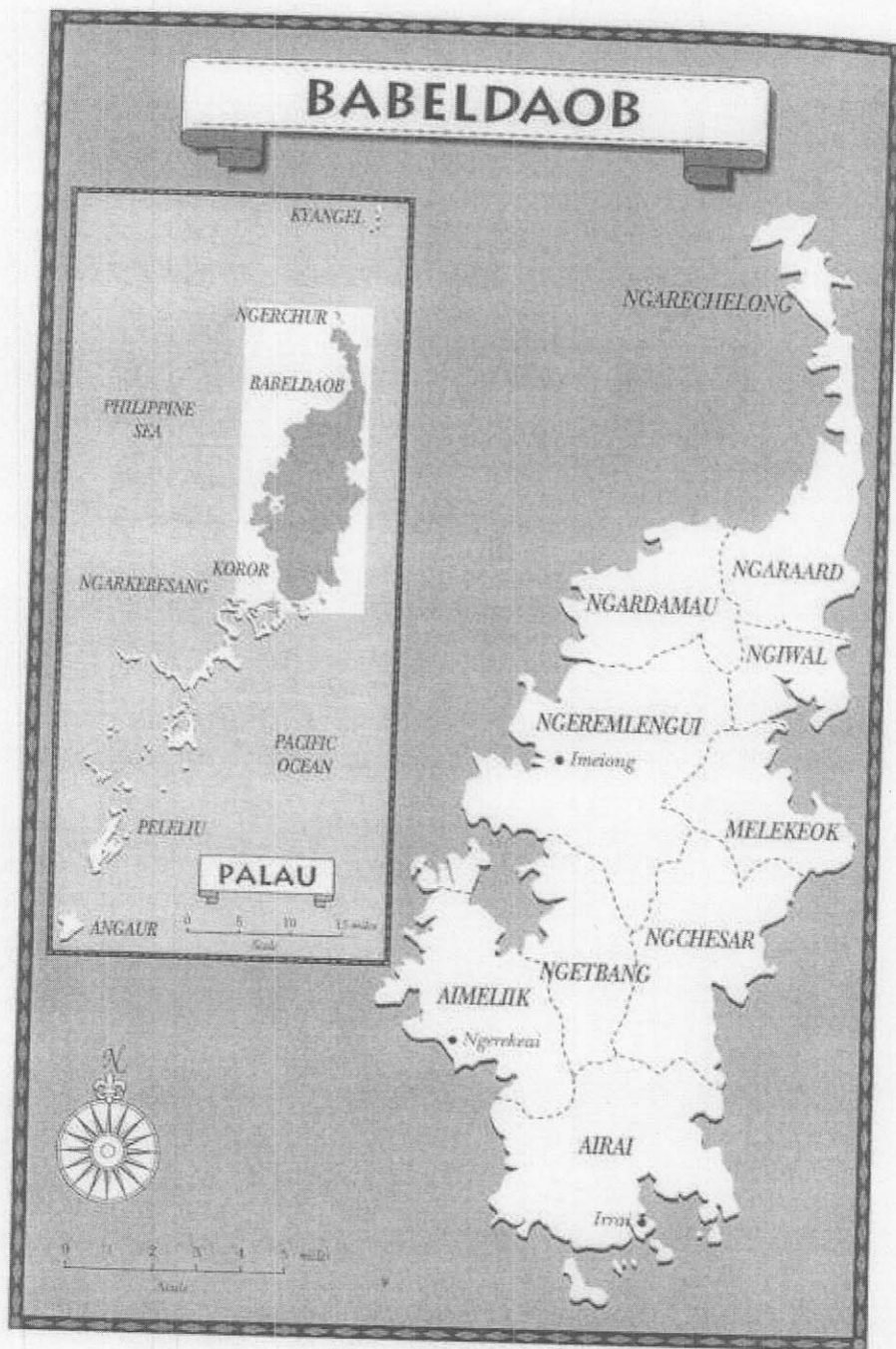
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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PALAU

Beginnings

Palau was an object of fascination for Catholic priests long before the first mission was established there. During the early 18th century, the many canoesful of Carolinians who drifted to the Philippines aroused the curiosity and zeal of the missionaries there and inspired a search for the mysterious islands of the "Palaos", as the Western Carolines were called. In 1710 a ship from Manila with three Jesuits aboard finally reached the island of Sonsorol and put ashore two priests, Frs. Duberron and Cortyl, to explore the prospects of working with the people. The ship was carried off by strong currents and the priests were never seen again, even when another vessel made a brief stop at the island two years later to bring them help. This and a later ill-starred attempt to found a mission on Ulithi dampened enthusiasm for setting up a mission to the Western Carolines.

When the Spanish Capuchins were finally entrusted with the task of opening a mission in the Carolines in the late 19th century, Palau again was considered a possible field for evangelization. In late June 1886, on their voyage to Yap to open the first mission, six Capuchins visited Palau for a few days and met Ibedul and a few of the other ranking chiefs of Koror. They received a gracious welcome and, after passing out rosaries and medals to their hosts, left with a promise that they would return as soon as they had the manpower to staff a mission there. Their first obligation was to found the church in Yap, the headquarters of the Spanish administration in the western Carolines. The following year, in February 1887, the Spanish Capuchins intended to visit Palau briefly again en route to staff the new mission on Pohnpei, but storms prevented their ship from putting in at the island.

In 1890, when the Capuchins were well established on Yap and new recruits were expected from Spain, the missionaries decided that the time had come to make serious preparations to

extend their work to Palau. Fr. Daniel Arbacegui, the Capuchin superior in Yap, and a lay brother, Antolin Orihuela, sailed to Palau in July aboard O'Keefe's trading schooner *Santa Cruz* on a run to quarry Yapese stone money. Ibedul was much cooler towards the Capuchins than he had been four years earlier. The missionaries attributed this to the stories some foreigners were spreading among the people that the Spanish were mustering an assault force of two warships and 600 troops to bring Palau to submission. Fr. Daniel spent several days with Ibedul trying to convince the chiefs of the missionaries' peaceful intentions. Eventually suspicions were broken down and the Koror people loaded the missionaries with gifts before they returned to Yap.

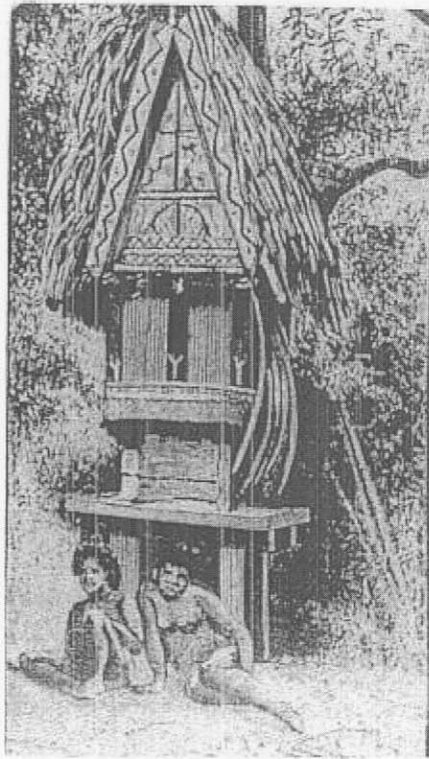
On April 28, 1891, the *Santa Cruz* again put into Palau, this time bringing two priests and two brothers to found the first permanent mission. Ibedul greeted the Capuchins effusively and immediately turned over to them an old meeting house that they could use as their quarters. The meeting house, situated near the water, was crumbling on its foundation and was infested with vermin, but the Capuchins walled off a portion for a chapel and used the rest as their temporary residence. Within a few days, they had already marked off a site for the new house, blessed this ground, and planted a large cross as a "sign of the redemption they were bringing to these infidel lands." The four Capuchins—Frs. Antonio de Valencia and Luis de Granada, and Brs. Joaquin de Masamagrell and Oton de Ochovi—began entertaining the handful of Palauans bold enough to visit the missionaries.

From the start, the Capuchins waged an all-out battle against Palauan custom. Fr. Valencia, who wrote a lengthy report on Palau after a year on the island, saw their missionary work as a struggle to replace the traditional customs with "new and better ones." The clubhouse prostitution, the ease with which couples divorced and remarried, and the local sorcery and spirit communication were among the main targets of the missionary campaign. The Capuchins made no effort to conceal their disgust with such practices from Ibedul and the other chiefs. The Palauan response to such an announced program of social change was to withdraw, of course, and Palauans at first simply ignored the

missionaries. Valencia attributed this aloofness to the people's misunderstanding of why the missionaries had come. "Some took us for traders who dressed differently from the others who had already made their home here," he wrote. "Others thought that we had come to assume rule over the islands and Spanish troops would soon follow." But the intentions of the missionaries were plain: "to bring a new teaching and a new way of life diametrically opposed to their own," as Valencia put it.

The chiefs found the missionary aims disturbing. At first they openly tried to prevent children, who gathered around the mission residence out of curiosity, from visiting the Capuchins, but the children found one excuse or another to come anyway. The chiefs had no alternative but to relent, so they told the Capuchins they would let the children visit them again when their new residence was finished. In ten months the house was completed, a sturdy little building made of planks and bamboo, open to the breezes and so windy at times that the kerosene lamp could not be kept lit. The new residence had a chapel at one end, just as the *bai* had. Even before its completion, a

small number of women and their children began stopping by the mission almost daily. They enjoyed looking at religious pictures: stories of angels and saints, demons, Our Lady and Jesus himself.



A Palauan spirit-house

A few of them, invariably those from high-ranking families, began their catechetical instruction during these informal sessions.

Even during their early months in Palau when the Capuchins were shunned by most people, they had their moments of triumph. One high-born man petitioned the missionaries so insistently to baptize his three-year old child that the priests, who at first wanted to postpone the baptism until it could be performed with proper solemnity, were compelled to administer the sacrament immediately. The child, who was given the baptismal name of Salvador, was the first of 14 children baptized during the initial year of missionary work. The Capuchins would only bestow the sacrament with the consent of the parents, and Palauan parents had good cause to hesitate. They had to show proper respect for the wishes of Palauan leaders, who were not very sympathetic to the new religion. Then, too, some feared that the pouring of water on the child's head would make it a slave of the devil, as rumor had it. Nonetheless, nine adults were also baptized during the first year, all of them while in danger of death. One of them, a blind old man who was close to his last hour, told the woman caring for him in a weak voice that he wished to be baptized so his soul would go to heaven. The man, who was given the sacrament and the name Bonaventure, died a week later.

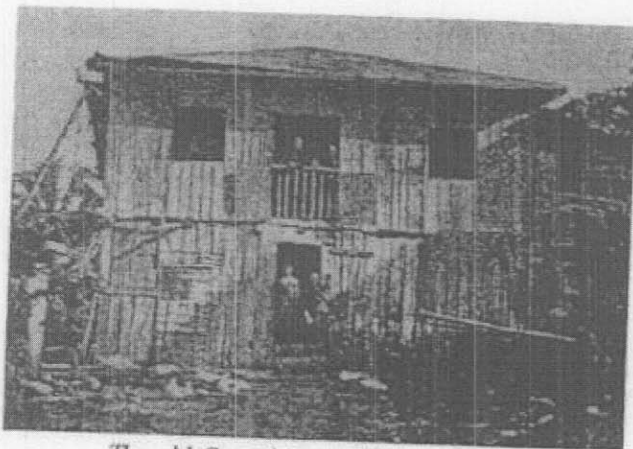
Perhaps the most distinguished of the converts, and the first healthy adult to be received into the church, was a 24-year old woman by the name of Udemol who had been blind from birth. Given the name Maria Pilar, she proved to be the most faithful of these early Christians and an of inspiration for the missionaries and their small flock. Pilar attended mass every morning and rosary in the afternoons. With her keen memory and thorough knowledge of the people, she served as a living parish register for the Capuchins and their successors. A later missionary said of her: "She knows who was baptized, who was married, who was divorced, and who has died. She can relate the life story of those Christians still living as well as those who have gone to their rest in the Lord." No one symbolized as much as Pilar the bravery and fidelity of the early Palauan converts, and no one played as

important a role as she during the first critical 30 years of the church's growth.

Pilar and a retarded man in Ibedul's family were the only baptized adults who survived, the others all succumbing to illness soon after they received the sacrament. The Capuchins reported that others would have liked to have been received by the church, even in these early days, but they were reluctant to request baptism before their social betters. The missionaries were disturbed by the prevailing social etiquette: high-ranking people were supposed to be the first to receive baptism, even though they were usually the most unlikely candidates according to the missionaries' own norms. In their visits to Palauan homes, the Capuchins found that people welcomed them warmly and provided food in generous amounts, as Ibedul had done at their arrival. The people listened attentively as the missionaries explained the mysteries of their faith, but they almost always put off any real change in lifestyle that the gospel might have demanded. Even those under serious instruction were slow to depart from custom. Very few of those who were given clothing by the Capuchins wore trousers or dresses to mass, and almost none of the women used the veils that they received to cover their heads.

An influenza epidemic that raged through the island in early 1892 proved to be an unexpected boon to the missionary work. The epidemic, which laid people low for three to six days, offered the Capuchins a good excuse to step up their home visiting. As they stopped in homes, the Capuchins looked at the sick members of the family and prescribed a hot broth that relieved the flu victims. The success of this remedy and the apparent immunity of the Spanish missionaries to the disease amazed the people, who attributed this to the power of their god. Even those Palauans who had no interest in the new religion often asked the Capuchins to pray that the epidemic be ended. The response from the missionaries was that they would pray for those who were baptized; others could pray to their own spirits for deliverance.

We know very little of subsequent Spanish Capuchin work in Palau. Whatever letters the missionaries may have written are not to be found in the usual sources. Sometime during the first year



The old Capuchin residence in Koror

of their work in Koror, a new church was built and dedicated to the Sacred Heart, and in January 1892 the first mission school was opened there. The following year there was a change in

mission personnel. Fr. Antonio de Valencia and Br. Joaquin were replaced by Fr. Toribio de Filiel and Br. Eulogio de Quintanilla. Valencia, the priest who was quick to declare war on Palauan custom, was transferred to Yap where he struggled on against pagan ways. His successor, Fr. Toribio, cared for the Koror parish for the next four years, after which he was replaced by Fr. Silvestre de Santibañez.

Babeldaob, which the Capuchins visited occasionally for short stays, soon had its own mission station. In April 1893, Fr. Luis de Granada established a residence and a chapel named for St. Joseph in Ngarchelong in the northern end of Babeldaob. Within a year he was also running a small school. Fr. Luis, who had a reputation for personal austerity among his fellow Capuchins, was aloof and uncompromising in his dealings with Palauans. He spoke out fiercely against clubhouse prostitution and did not hesitate to smash talismans and the sacred traditional images that his people venerated. He soon became known to Palauans from all over Babeldaob as the man who wanted to destroy the customs and deprive men of their sexual joys. The Palauans retaliated by building a residence for him out of *titimel* wood, a material that rotted very quickly, in the hope that he would leave Ngarchelong when his house rotted away. Ignorant of what was afoot, the

priest roofed the residence with tin sheets which protected the *titimel* from the moisture and prevented it from decaying.

Fr. Luis moved on after a time to bring the gospel to other parts of northern Babeldaob. He took up residence in Chelab, Ngaraard, but his militant stance towards Palauan customs soon alienated the people of that place as well. One day, as the priest walked into the church to begin mass, he found human feces smeared on the altar. Horrified at this desecration, Fr. Luis packed his belongings and, in the biblical gesture of rejection, shook the dust from his sandals as he left the village. Some believe he uttered a malediction upon the place before departing from Ngaraard for good.

In search of a place more receptive to him and the religion he preached, the priest moved to Ngiwal where he was treated more kindly. Hearing of the traditional prestige of Melekeok, however, he decided to settle there under the protection of Reklai Ngiracheremang in the hope that he might have a wider influence throughout the area. The chief's patronage guaranteed that there would be no repetition of what had happened in Ngarchelong and Ngaraard, however strongly the old priest chided the people for the evils of their society. Nonetheless, resentment soon built up against Fr. Luis as it had in the other places. One day early in 1903, not long after the priest had come to Melekeok, he lost his way as he was visiting one of the hamlets in Ngchesar. The man he asked directions of deliberately sent him the wrong way and the priest was forced to wade across a stream and wander for hours through the woods. Fr. Luis, already debilitated by sickness and now chilled and feverish from his exertions, collapsed in a remote area. He was found by chance and carried to Melekeok, where he died not long afterwards.

Fr. Luis' missionary career was a tale of frustration and apparent failure. Neither the Palauan catechism nor the devotionalary that he wrote during his years in Babeldaob was ever published. His work in Ngarchelong and Ngaraard came to a premature and unhappy end when he was rejected by the people to whom he had tried to preach Christianity. His death was hastened by the maliciousness of one of the many people whom he had

offended. Yet, the man who had found no home in Babeldaob during his active ministry found one in death. The priest was buried with honor on Reklai's clan land and his grave marked with coral to indicate that he came from across the sea. The small mission station that he established in Melekeok in the final months of his life became Christianity's foothold in Babeldaob. It remained under the patronage of St. Joseph and would have another Capuchin, Fr. Cristobal, as pastor during the final days of Spanish work in the mission.

The Spanish Capuchins struggled on a few years longer, even though Germany had acquired possession of the Carolines in 1899. The rigors of mission life had taken their toll of these early missionaries: Br. Oton died in Koror in 1898, five years before Fr. Luis succumbed to his various illnesses, and Fr. Toribio was compelled to return to Spain because of poor health. The remaining four Capuchins had to continue their work without government support. Attendance fell off in their schools, since Spanish language instruction was no longer very important to Palauans now that a new nation ruled the islands. Finally, in 1906, the last of the Spanish priests and brothers departed from the mission. They left a Catholic community numbering 140 in a total population of over 4000.

Expansion under the Germans

The German Capuchins arrived in force in January 1907, soon after the departure of the Spanish missionaries. Fr. Salvator Walleser and three lay brothers joined Fr. Raymund Laile, who had been assigned to Palau the year before to supervise the mission school in Koror. For the first few years the German missionaries all lived together in Koror and channeled their energies into upgrading the facilities of their main mission station. The old Spanish-built residence, by then beyond repair, was replaced by a larger wooden building. Next, a frame structure that could serve as the girls school and convent was erected under the direction of Br. Ivo, for the mission had already been promised German Franciscan sisters to run the girls school. Plans were then made to replace the small shack, built of sheet metal, that had served as

the church up to that time. In the meantime, Sunday services were held in the spacious girls school building.

The German government, which had recently stationed a resident administrator in Palau, proved a powerful ally to the mission in its campaign for reform. The government outlawed clubhouse prostitution and some of the other traditional practices that had vexed the Spanish missionaries so much. The government also declared war on the local sorcerers, who would communicate with the spirits upon request and payment of a stipulated sum. When some of these spirit mediums tried to incite an uprising in 1906, the German government exiled six of their number to Yap. Afterwards, in an all-out effort to suppress these sorcerers entirely, the government destroyed many of their shrines and arrested several who continued practicing spirit contact. All of this delighted the missionaries, who saw such traditional practices as an obstacle to the evangelization of the island.

The German Capuchins, like their Spanish predecessors, found that Palauans were in no rush to become Christians, but they were very eager to have their children attend the mission school. This was all the more true since the Capuchins had a monopoly on education; the government had not established public schools and had no intention of doing so. Realizing that they had little hope of making any massive changes in adults, the German missionaries willingly concentrated on the education of the young. They saw schools as the perfect means of winning the hearts and minds of a new generation to Christ and molding their lifestyle accordingly.



German Capuchin school in Palau

Ibedul had lent enthusiastic support to the mission school program from the beginning. Soon the Koror school had an enrollment of about 70 students, most of them from high-ranking families. At the grand celebration for the Kaiser's birthday in 1908, the school children recited German poetry and sang several German songs to an enormous assembly of people who had gathered from all over Palau.

When the first three Franciscan sisters arrived in 1909, they were immediately put in charge of the girls school in Koror. Besides teaching the 50 female day students, the sisters took in as boarders four young girls from the most influential families in Koror. In both boys and girls schools all teaching, except for religious instruction, was done in German. The children, who ranged in age from 6 to the early 20s, showed up each morning with their slates and exercise books. Attendance was unfailingly good, the missionaries reported, and the students were industrious. The pupils copied Palauan sentences from the board, which they translated into German on their slates, and after correcting the mistakes, transcribed the German translation in ink into their notebooks. In geography class Palauan students memorized the European countries and their capitals, and they could never seem to get enough of the large maps that were periodically unrolled during class. Young Palauans, like their elders, had a thirst to learn about the Western world, the missionaries observed.

The Capuchins could have opened a school in every district if they had the personnel, so great was the demand for education. As it was, they limited their work to Koror for the first few years so as not to dissipate their energy. Finally, in May 1910, they opened a second mission residence in Melekeok, where the Spanish had assigned a resident priest between 1903 and 1906. The people of Melekeok rebuilt the whole station—a rectory with cookhouse, and a 60-foot long school that also served as a church—and the new mission complex was dedicated in the presence of the German government representative and most of the Melekeok population. Fr. Basilius was entrusted with the care of the parish and Br. Kleophas was assigned to assist him. Within a short time the boys school had 136 pupils, the older ones attending

classes each morning and the younger in the afternoon.

A year later, Melekeok had its own resident sisters and a girls school as well. The two Franciscan sisters who



Classroom in a German mission school

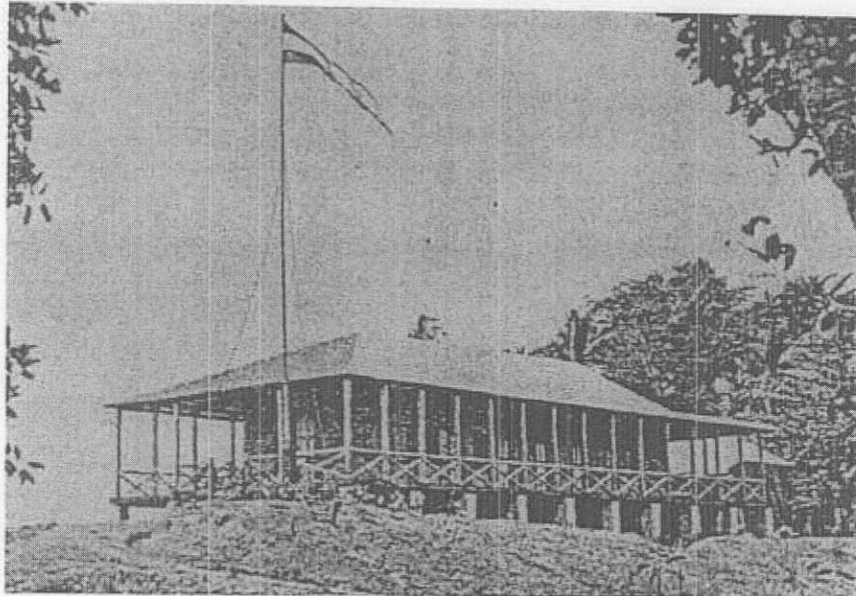
arrived in December 1911 to teach in Melekeok were installed in the rectory until their new convent was completed, while Fr. Basilius used as his temporary lodging a house that Reklai himself had once lived in. The sisters began classes for 50 girls, half of whom lived on the premises as boarding students. The total enrollment was close to 150, even larger than the mission school in Koror, and Fr. Basilius soon had to start planning for the construction of a new and larger classroom building. Besides teaching and supervising their live-in students, the sisters also did some nursing in the community, which had an especially high concentration of cancer and tuberculosis patients.

Even in its first two years, the Melekeok mission was surprisingly successful. Adults showed an unusually keen interest in sermons and religious instruction, even if they did not always become church members, and deathbed baptisms were a frequent occurrence. In a single year there were 60 baptisms recorded in Melekeok, while Koror had fewer than ten. The missionaries, from the very beginning, had found the religious apathy in Koror disappointing; they found it even more so in contrast with Melekeok. The Capuchins attributed the slow progress in Koror to the pernicious impact of foreign influence on its people. They also wondered whether the number of fallen away Christians from the early days, most of them from the environs of Koror, did not retard the spread of Catholicism. Few of those who had been

baptized as children by the Spanish missionaries persevered in their faith, the Capuchins lamented. Once they reached young adulthood, Palauans normally ran into marriage difficulties, abandoned their wives and their faith, and resumed those pagan customs they had eschewed at their entrance into the church.

The establishment of a mission residence in Melekeok was just the beginning of church expansion in Palau. In 1911, the year after the Melekeok church was opened, three new mission stations were founded in other parts of the island. The first was in Ngatmel, a village on the northern tip of Ngarchelong, where a community of about 80 Chamorros dwelt. In response to their request for regular pastoral care, Fr. Basilius had them build a church, visited them each month for mass and the sacraments, and recruited a Chamorro to teach at the mission school he organized for the ten or 15 school-age children. This small out-station, largely self-maintaining, never attracted a Palauan following of any size, but remained almost exclusively a Chamorro enclave. Another sub-station was opened in Airai later in the year. The people there, as in other districts, had been requesting a mission school of their own for some time and were willing to accept a church as well. As soon as a small residence and a school building were built, one of the priests from Koror began visiting the sub-station two or three times a week. The school was taught by Timarong, a Palauan Catholic who was himself trained in the mission school in Koror, and a year later the enrollment stood at 40 pupils.

The largest of the mission stations founded in 1911 was the one at Aimeliik, which was opened to serve the Pohnpeian exiles resettled there. Following the Sokehs rebellion on Pohnpei, the German Government banished the defeated population of Sokehs, numbering some 450 persons, the great majority of whom were Catholic. The first of the exiles, about 50 women and children, arrived in February 1911, while the able-bodied men were doing punitive labor in the Angaur phosphate mines and the remainder of the people awaited their travel orders on Yap. When the other exiles finally arrived in December, the Capuchins were faced with a pastoral problem of some magnitude. Somehow they would have



Koror residence, built by Capuchins in 1907

to provide spiritual care for nearly 400 Catholics—more than the total Palauan church membership at the time—and they would have to do this in a language none of them yet spoke. The missionaries did what they could under the circumstances. They assigned a resident priest, Fr. Placidus, to Aimeliik to provide much-needed material assistance and spiritual comfort to the exiles, even as he worked to establish the faith among the 200 Palauans who resided in the district. In the shed-like building that served as both church and school, Fr. Placidus held Sunday services in two languages and taught two separate classes on weekdays: one for Pohnpeians three hours each morning, and another for Palauans between 1 and 4 in the afternoon.

This period of expansion was a time of growth for the church in Koror, too. The school, which had always been the mainspring of church work there, grew to an enrollment of about 100. Older students who had attended classes for four or five years were dismissed so that younger ones could occupy their places. The enrollment was no longer as exclusively drawn from chiefly

families as it had been a few years earlier. Moreover, the sisters were finding it much easier to persuade parents to allow their daughters to board at the mission, and so the girls dormitory now housed 26. The boys and girls schools were combined and run entirely by the three Franciscan sisters. This permitted the priests to devote more time to pastoral work and freed the building once used as the boys school so that it could be converted into a permanent church, replacing the smaller one that was now inadequate for the parish's needs. Even in more specifically religious matters there were unmistakable signs of progress. Church attendance was increasing in a village that had never been distinguished for its number of church-goers. One old man even tied knots in a cord to remind himself to attend mass every seventh day. Conversions had at last begun to show some growth: there were 37 adults baptisms in Koror during 1912, and all the boarding students were either baptized or preparing to receive the sacrament.

No sooner had these promising developments occurred than the mission received a serious setback. In November 1912 a severe typhoon struck Palau and demolished all the mission buildings in Melekeok, Aimeliik, Airai and Ngatmel; only Koror escaped serious damage. The schools and churches, which had been none too strongly built in the first place, were reduced to rubble. For Christmas that year the Pohnpeiians at Aimeliik had to travel all the way to Koror, while the Airai and Ngatmel Christians were forced to do without church services altogether. Money for new construction and major repairs was scarce, but the Capuchins somehow used local materials combined with wood and tin salvaged from the ruins to rebuild the structures, at least until they could find the resources to put up something more lasting. Within six months of the typhoon all the schools were in full operation once again.

The next year or two saw considerable personnel changes in the mission. In 1912 Fr. Salvator Walleser, who had been superior of Palau for the previous five years, was named the first bishop of the Vicariate of the Carolines and Marianas. Besides directing the Capuchin work in Palau, Walleser wrote prolifically



Br. Sebald tending chickens

on the language and culture as well as on religious themes. His publications included a catechism, a devotional and a book of bible readings in Palauan, a Palauan grammar, and a Palauan-German dictionary. When Walleser returned to the vicariate after his episcopal ordination, he took up residence in Pohnpei instead of Palau. Fr. Callistus, who had spent part of 1909 in Palau, was assigned to replace Walleser in 1913, but he was in Palau only a few months before he was recalled to

Manila and from there transferred to Rabaul to oversee the mission plantation. Fr. Gebhard, who had originally been assigned to Palau to assume pastoral care of the Pohnpeians, was sent to Truk instead. Fr. Wunibald arrived in 1913 to become the pastor of Koror and the Capuchin superior. At the same time there was a complete turnover of personnel among the teaching sisters; all four sisters left in 1913 and five new ones replaced them in the schools.

The missionaries had hoped to extend their work to other parts of Palau, especially to Peleliu and Ngaraard, but they never had the manpower to do so. The three priests and two brothers assigned to the mission barely sufficed to staff the three principal stations: Koror, Melekeok and Aimeliik. The missionaries could

do no more than open a new sub-station in Ngiwal to be cared for by the pastor of Melekeok.

In October 1914 an event that proved far more disastrous than the typhoon of two years earlier befell the mission. Two Japanese warships steamed into Malakal Harbor not long after the outbreak of World War I to seize the islands in the name of Japan. All German nationals except the missionaries were deported within the month, and the fate of the missionaries themselves appeared very uncertain. Although the religious were told by Japanese authorities that they could continue their work in Palau, Japanese troops would periodically sweep through the Koror mission compound to conduct impromptu searches. The troops flirted with the sisters, terrified the boarding students, and on a few occasions even manhandled the priests. Shortly after their landing the soldiers simply appropriated the school building for their own use over a two-month period. In all, the Japanese military made enough of a nuisance of themselves to frighten the Capuchin superior into sending the sisters off to Melekeok, where it was supposed they would be safer. Perhaps, as Fr. Wunibald later wrote, the missionaries were treated as well as one could expect of a belligerent nation in wartime. But for the sisters, at least, the treatment left much to be desired.

The missionaries continued their work under increasingly trying circumstances for another year. Finally, in early October 1915, the German Capuchins were summoned to appear before a military tribunal. During the day-long proceedings they were charged with inciting the local people to rebel against the Japanese government and transmitting reports of troop and ship movements to the enemy. The hearings continued off and on until the end of the month, when the Japanese commander declared that the missionaries were to leave within a month. On November 30, 1915, the five Capuchins and five Franciscan sisters bade their final farewells to their Palauan friends and were marched down to the dock where they boarded a military transport bound for Japan. They left behind a Palauan church community that had grown to 400, a tender plant that others would water and nurture in years to come.

Nurturing the Plant

It was more than five years before missionaries returned to Palau. On March 16, 1921, a Japanese steamship brought four Spanish Jesuits to Palau, part of the contingent of 22 Jesuits assigned to staff the Carolines-Marianas-Marshalls mission that Rome had recently entrusted to the Society of Jesus. Despite Japan's earlier hostility towards missionaries, the Japanese government in 1920 petitioned the Vatican for other Catholic missionaries to replace the German Capuchins they had evicted, but with the proviso that they be from a neutral nation. By this time Japan's title to the islands it had seized from Germany was secure. Japan was formally recognized by the League of Nations as trustee for the new Pacific Mandate, and Palau was soon to become the headquarters for the Mandate.

The four Jesuits assigned to Palau—Frs. Indalecio Llera and Marino de la Hoz and Brs. Jose Gogenola and Emilio Villar—received an enthusiastic greeting from the dozens of Catholics who turned out to meet them: Palauans in their loincloths and representatives of the Chamorro community in pants and shirts. The people sang as they escorted their new missionaries from the dockside to the Koror church in a reversal of the sad departure of five years earlier. The Jesuits found the church and residence in amazingly good condition, everything considered, and were pleasantly surprised to learn that some house furnishings and a canoe that had belonged to the Capuchins were in storage in one of the trading company warehouses.

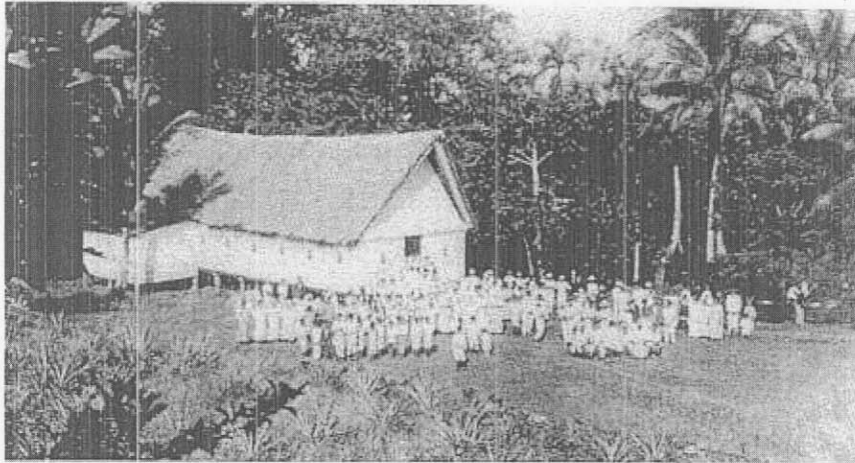
As the Jesuits started visiting Christian communities in other parts of Palau during the next few months, however, they began to comprehend how great a rebuilding job they faced. In Airai nothing remained of the old church and school-residence building but the foundations, and the garden that had once provided food for the priest and his students had gone wild. Ngiwal was even worse; the mission buildings had disappeared so completely that the Jesuits could not even find any trace of the foundations. The church in Ngarchelong that had once served the Chamorro

community living in the village of Ngatmel was long gone, as were all the mission buildings in Aimeliik, the temporary home of the Pohnpeian exiles. Melekeok, too, once the largest mission station outside of Koror, was in complete ruins. Everywhere they went outside Koror, the Jesuits found the old mission stations utterly devastated.

But the toll taken during the five years of missionary absence went beyond material destruction. Only half of the small Catholic congregation in Airai bothered to show up for mass on the Jesuits' first visit to that place; the rest were out fishing for the day. The same thing happened in Ngiwal, where no more than a dozen people greeted the priests. The Chamorros in Ngatmel turned out at church in greater numbers, as these religious-minded people always did, but very few of the Palauan Catholics from the main settlement in Ngarchelong bothered to attend. The trochus season had started, as it happened, and many of the adults were out collecting trochus shell to sell to Japanese merchants. This experience might have served as a warning to the new missionaries of the difficulties they could expect in the future.

Even as they worked to learn the language and customs, the Jesuits hoped to maintain the Melekeok church, which with the support of the Reklai had been the most promising spot in the Palau mission. Fr. Marino and Br. Gogenola made Melekeok their home as soon as temporary quarters could be arranged and a building set up for use as a chapel. From their base in Melekeok they did what they could for the small, scattered communities of Catholics in northern Babeldaob. Then, on Easter Sunday of 1922, a typhoon struck and destroyed most of the mission buildings. The two Jesuits remained in Melekeok for another year, rebuilding as their finances allowed, but increasingly they found themselves pastors without a flock. Even at that early date Palauans were beginning to move to Koror in some numbers to find jobs with the government.

From 1923 on, the Jesuits concentrated their main efforts on Koror, which was rapidly growing into a sizable little town. Within a year of their arrival a construction team of imported laborers was at work building at Medalaii dozens of Japanese



[above and below] Sacred Heart Church, Koror, in 1925



homes for foreign business and government employees. The picturesque description of Koror given by one of the Jesuits in 1921—"a pretty little park two kilometers long and one kilometer wide divided by a single road, with 42 houses scattered under palm trees"—was already outdated. By the end of the decade the town would hold 250

government-built houses for an immigrant population that would number over 2000. In such a climate of rapid expansion, there were bound to be many job openings for Palauans and the local population of Koror grew steadily.

As the new missionaries settled into their ordinary pastoral activities, they began to experience many of the same problems

their predecessors had reported. Palauans were not avid churchgoers, they found; only a fraction of those whose names were on the parish register as Catholics actually attended Sunday mass. Church teaching on Christian marriage and divorce posed one of the major obstacles for Palauans. Of ten Palauan marriages that had been blessed by earlier missionaries, one of the priests wrote, only one survived. The others had all broken up and both men and women were living with new partners. Many of the younger converts had married outside the church and, consequently, attended mass only on Christmas and Easter, if then.

In the face of these difficulties, the missionaries found consolation in their work with other groups. Days after their arrival, the priests paid their first visit to Angaur, where they found over a hundred Chamorro Catholics, employees of the phosphate mines and their families. The men had built a simple plank chapel that the Jesuits blessed in October 1921. Happy that



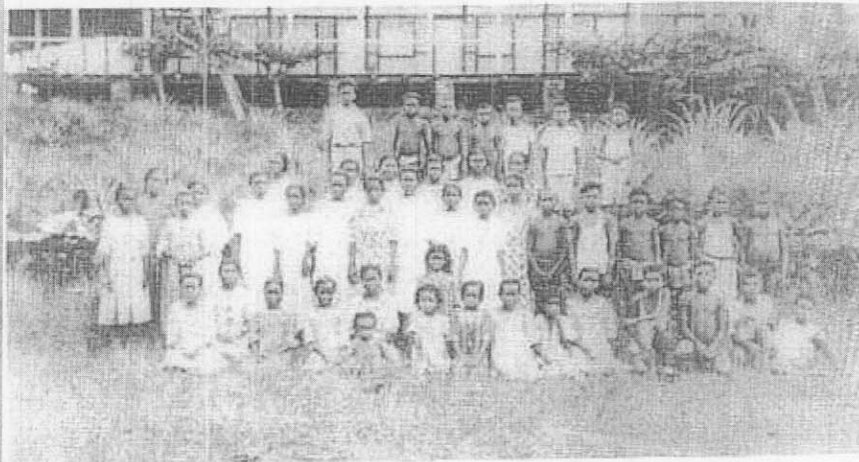
Palau Jesuit missionaries in front of the Koror residence; Br. Emilio Villar and Fr. Marino de la Hoz (standing), and Fr. Eduardo Rodes (seated left), with visiting superiors, Frs. Pons and Guasch

they had found a community whose devotion repaid their efforts, the priests began making regular visits to the island for mass and religious instruction, and even processions on the major feast days. The 70 outer islanders who were living in Ngarkebesang provided the other source of encouragement to the missionaries in what they regarded as a sea of desolation. Some of these people had been baptized by the German Capuchins shortly after their resettlement in Koror following a typhoon in 1907, but their conversion and religious instruction was largely the work of two dedicated individuals: Rosamunda and Francisco Javier. Devout and possessed of a simple faith, the outer islanders walked in a group each Sunday morning to the mass in Koror, which otherwise would have been sparsely attended.

The Jesuits had been told that unless they ran schools like the Capuchins, their efforts to win over the people would amount to very little. Earlier missionary forays into education had proven successful even when other pastoral efforts met with an indifferent response. Most of the converts during German times came from the students at mission schools and their families, whatever might be said of their perseverance in the faith after adolescence. Unfortunately, however, the Jesuits had little choice in the matter. The Japanese government ran its own public school system and did not look kindly on attempts to set up private schools. What's more, the requirement that all instruction be conducted in the Japanese language made Catholic schools a virtual impossibility. In Palau, as in other parts of the vicariate, therefore, the Jesuits established a catechetical program for those attending public school. Twice each day the priests conducted religious instruction for a total of 60 or 70 public school students, and on Sundays they held additional catechism classes for those who worked after school on weekdays as houseboys or housemaids for the Japanese.

Within a few years a number of changes were made in the mission personnel. Fr. Indalecio Llera, who had been local superior for the first few years, was transferred to the Marianas in 1924, and the priest who succeeded him remained only a year before he too left Palau. Finally, in 1926, Fr. Elias Fernandez was assigned to Palau where he and Fr. Marino de la Hoz

shouldered the full pastoral burden for nearly twenty years. Br. Gogenola was transferred to Pohnpei in 1924, and his replacement, Br. Gregorio Ruiz, served for only three years before he returned to Spain, broken in health, to die a few months later. Br. Emilio del Villar, one of the first Jesuits to arrive in Palau, alone



Catechism students gathered in front of the Koror rectory

remained to support the priestly work of his companions, Frs. Marino and Elias.

One of the typhoons that periodically surprised Palau struck the island in May 1927. It was preceded by a series of earthquakes and smaller tremors that began five months earlier and were interpreted by the priests and some of their parishioners as a divine warning to abandon "the shadows of sin and infidelity" in which many lived. The typhoon leveled the residence and the newly enlarged church in Koror, to say nothing of the private homes in the town. Damage to other mission stations was minimal because there was very little of any value that could be damaged.

While the people of Koror began repairs on their own houses, the ever dependable outer islanders from Ngarkebesang erected a makeshift shelter for the Jesuits to see them through the next few

days. The Japanese government provided the mission with a little financial assistance for reconstruction, although it would not permit the use of the public school building for Sunday mass. There was at least one good effect of the typhoon, however: it forced the missionaries to begin, at long last, construction of a decent church in Koror.

Each month the priests made pastoral visits to the Christian communities outside Koror: Melekeok, Airai, Aimeliik, Ngarchelong, Ngiwal and Angaur. They had a small boat with a two-horsepower engine that they could use for their travels, but they frequently took advantage of the government-run launch that serviced the islands. The missionaries of necessity spent little time in these out-stations, and the results of their work were not always visible. Peleliu was an exception, however. The Jesuits had visited this island, a stronghold of the Modekngai religion, from the beginning without making any more than three converts. Then, in 1926, an old woman possessing the highest female title on the island was won over to Christianity by her daughter. The elderly lady, once a Modekngai adherent, began proselytizing among the others in this sect. Word circulated around the island that the ancient god of Peleliu appeared to his devotees instructing them that he would appear to them no more and urging them to embrace the "light coming from the sea" brought to the island by those wearing long robes. Aided by this endorsement, Jesuits, wearing their black soutanes, found a new interest in Christianity. In a few years they had 160 converts, including the most prominent families on Peleliu.

For some years the missionaries' only contact with the outer atolls to the southwest was through those people who had migrated into Koror. Then, in August 1930, a priest visited Sonsorol for the first time since 1710, when two unfortunate Belgian Jesuits were stranded there and were presumed to have been murdered by the inhabitants. When Fr. Elias reached Sonsorol on a Nanyo Boeki schooner, he found 90 adults, over half the island population, ready to receive baptism. Perhaps he was reaping "the fruit of the tree watered by martyrs' blood", as one of his letters suggested. But the event also owed something to the dedicated

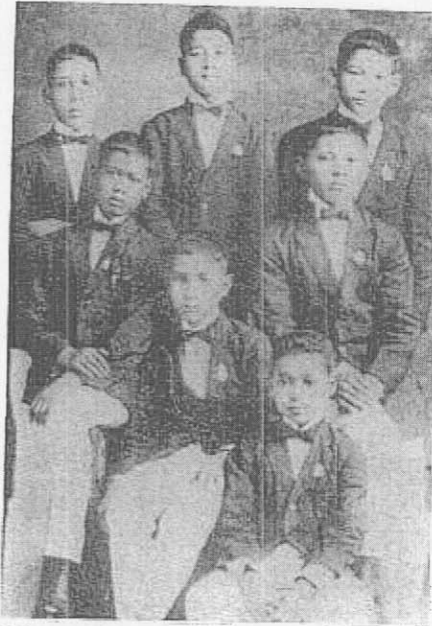
work of those Sonsorolese who had been converted on Palau and who, on their return to their own island, had zealously instructed others in the faith. Fr. Elias baptized the 90 adults, blessed the marriages of 35 couples, planted a cross some 40 feet high on the shore, and left with the assurance that the remainder of the population would be ready for baptism by the time he next visited the island.

Fr. Elias' first visit to Tobi six months later was much the same story. The seven Christians on the island, all of them converted in Palau, had instructed the whole population and built a small chapel that they filled every evening for rosary. When Fr. Elias met with the neophytes the first evening and questioned them, he was surprised to discover that they knew the basics of the faith and then some. For the remainder of his time on Tobi, he baptized them in bands of 30 or 40 a day, while rectifying marriages and blessing crosses to be kept and venerated in each household. The only opposition the priests encountered came from a Japanese policeman who objected to Fr. Elias' insistence that the new converts refrain from work on Sundays. By the time the Jesuit reboarded the schooner a week later, nearly the whole island population had been received into the church. The less populous islands of Pulo Ana and Merir were converted just as simply, and within two years the southwest atolls had become entirely Catholic. Thereafter, the Jesuits made visits to Sonsorol every six months, and to the other islands in the area once a year.

The church in Palau was slowly growing in numbers—from 400 in 1921 to over 1000 ten years later—despite the obstacles to conversion. Notwithstanding the sizable gap between church teaching on marriage and Palauan practice, the missionaries were clearly making headway in their evangelization. At times it may have seemed that the converts were drawn mainly from the disabled (the blind or infirm) and the marginalized of the island society (outer islanders and other minorities). Indeed, one of the early converts and a pillar of the church was a deaf-mute from Koror. Pilar, the blind woman who was baptized by the Spanish Capuchins years before, remained an exemplary Christian and an inspiration to the priests and their people. The 30-year old

Kadosang from Peleliu, crippled by disease and confined to his house, embraced the faith that he had rejected during his younger and healthier years and led several others to embrace it. Some of the most devout Christians in Palau were the lepers, whom the Japanese had isolated on the tiny island of Ngerur a few miles offshore and whom the Jesuits visited each month or two.

Yet, not all the heroes of the church were among the weak and rejected. Reklai Tellei, who held one of the most prestigious titles in Palau, was an ardent supporter of the church up to his death in 1937. It was due to his patronage that the Christian community in Melekeok flourished so well during German days. Two young men, Indalecio Rudimch and Emmanuel Yoshiwo, joined three others from different parts of the mission in entering the minor seminary in Tokyo in 1928. Although both later left the seminary because of illness, they became important lay leaders in the Palau church.



Micronesian seminarians

Choked by Thorns

If Catholicism was making headway in Palau, the twin forces of modernization and secularization were making even more. Nearly all the residents of Koror, those same people who twenty years before dressed in grass-skirts and loincloths, now wore Japanese apparel: the men in white trousers and shirts, the women in kimonos, sometimes made of silk. Palauans working as errand boys or messengers could be seen at all times of the day bicycling up and down the roads of Koror. Far more ominous in the eyes

of the missionaries, though, was the "thirst for money" that had become widespread within just a few years. To buy their clothes and provide the other appurtenances of modern life—electricity, housing materials and medicine, among other things—Palauans avidly sought a wage income. Worse still, Japanese public education was reinforcing these materialistic values in a learning environment far more congenial to atheism than to the religious beliefs the missionaries were working to instill.

Then, too, the Catholic priests had to contend with a new rival. In 1929 the first Liebenzell missionary couple came to Palau; they were followed by a second couple in 1930, and another four years later. The German evangelicals were soon making many conversions among the Modekngai adherents in northern Babeldaob, and later among Catholics. Already confronted by Shintoism, Modekngai, the residue of traditional spirit worship, and lately a growing secularism, the Catholics now had to deal with Protestantism.

The Jesuits had been furnishing what religious instruction they could to counter these influences, but they saw many of their young Catholics drift away after leaving the public elementary school. The casualties were greatest, of course, among the children of parents who ceased practicing their faith because of marriage irregularities. By the mid-1930s, the priests were supplementing their daily catechism classes with an intensive two-month catechetical school held in Koror during the summer vacation. This was an attempt, as one of the Jesuits put it, "to give them a bath of religion and wash away the atheism with which they have been infected in public school." Chamorro youth were brought to Koror a week before Christmas and Easter to attend catechetical instruction several hours a day. Soon this program was extended to Palauan young people as well.

Try as they might to devise a method of religious education, the Jesuits found the results disappointing. Young people from outside Koror sometimes could not find relatives with whom to live during the two-month summer program, and the mission had neither the money nor the living space to put them up on its own premises. The boys found other things to do, in any case, and

almost none showed up for the class. The attendance at the summer program was no more than twenty, all of them girls. Yet, the Jesuits continued to believe that if they could somehow only open a Catholic school, despite the restrictions imposed by the Japanese government, they might still save their young Catholics. In 1938 they completed work on a large building, begun years before but discontinued for lack of funds, that would serve as a combination schoolhouse and convent. The Mercedarian Sisters, whom they had invited to run the school, promised to extend their work to Palau as soon as they had the necessary personnel. After struggling for years to solve the problem of Catholic education, the missionaries were finally on the verge of finding a solution—on the eve of World War II.

Church-building activities were few due to limited funds and time, for it was not lay brothers but the two priests who supervised these activities. Most of these came to completion in the late 1930s. The new cement church in Koror, which still serves today, was dedicated on Easter 1935. Designed by Fr. Elias and nearly eight years in construction, Sacred Heart Church was the only cement building in Koror apart from a few government structures. Christians from all over Palau and high Japanese officials from Koror attended the solemn dedication. A Japanese woman, one of the three Japanese received into the church that year, was baptized at the high mass that day. A new church of cement and wood was put up on Angaur to replace the two separate chapels that had served the Chamorro and Palauan communities. Fr. Marino directed the construction and at times worked almost single-handedly on the project, nailing down the roofing tins in a torrential rainstorm just hours before the dedication of the church on December 8, 1939. A few months earlier, the church in Melekeok was transferred to a more central location, at the request of the people, and rebuilt on a cement base.

These building achievements, however, were overshadowed by another that drew dignitaries from abroad and occasioned a week-long celebration in Koror: the dedication of the Shinto temple in November 1940. Hundreds of Palauans, Catholics included, attended the festivities and participated in the dances, to the

chagrin of the Jesuits who complained of the empty churches for the All Saints Day and All Souls Day masses. The event served to highlight the tensions



Dedication of new Sacred Heart Church in Koror, April 1935

between church and state that had emerged in the late 30s.

Although the number of Catholics in Palau had grown to 2000, about one-third of the local population, the church was hampered by ever more stringent government regulations. Church-government relations, which began as a marriage of convenience in the early 20s, were deteriorating rapidly as Japan prepared for war. As the government mobilized the local labor force for its own purposes, the missionaries found it difficult to get the men needed to work on church projects. Moreover, the government's rapacious land policy was not only a direct threat to mission holdings, but encouraged local people, who saw their own land in danger, to compensate themselves at the expense of the church. In 1939 six separate pieces of church property were being contested in court. The Jesuits spent much of their time that year defending church property titles in a land claims court they considered hostile to their interests.

Other annoyances multiplied as well. The government put restrictions on the pastoral visits to the leper colony, so these visits became rarer and much briefer; and it was much more difficult to secure passage on the field trips to the outer islands. The

administration also lifted its long-time ban on the sale of alcohol to local people.

The most serious problem, though, was the government's interdiction of certain communities to the priests as the threat of global war grew more serious. Pastoral work on Peleliu, one of the more promising young Christian communities, came to an abrupt end in late 1937 when the Japanese closed the island to all foreigners, including missionaries. The government announced that the people of Peleliu were to be resettled on a distant part of that island and could, if they wished, move their church as well. The missionaries had been forbidden to visit the outer islanders living in Ngarkebesang since 1936, but the latter continued attending church in Koror. Then, in December 1938, the government revealed its plans to relocate these people in a remote part of Babeldaob where they would have no access to the missionaries. On Angaur, just months after the completion of the new church in December 1939, Japanese began preparing to transfer the Palauan residents to another island so as to expand mining operations there. Within a year, most of the Chamorro laborers moved to Ngardmau to work in the newly opened mines at a better salary than they were receiving on Angaur. From the perspective of the missionaries, however, it made little difference where they went. By that time the priests were banned from visiting Angaur and the resettlement sites.

Since the mid-1930s, mission superiors, aware of the growing mistrust of Japanese authorities towards the Spanish, hoped to find Japanese priests to work with them in the mission. It was becoming more obvious with each passing year that the Japanese intended to eventually replace all foreign missionaries with their own nationals. Appeals to church authorities in Japan had resulted in the assignment of one newly ordained diocesan Japanese priest, Peter Komatsu, to the mission. Fr. Komatsu visited Palau in late 1937 to be interviewed by government officials, and was then sent to Saipan, where he worked among Japanese and Okinawan settlers for a year. Although several Japanese bishops were willing to send priests to the islands, it was impossible to secure government approval as war drew closer. Two Japanese diocesan priests who

volunteered for the mission in 1941 never received their travel clearance from the government. The visit of an elderly Japanese priest, Fr. Wakida, who was appointed by Rome in 1940 to report on conditions in the mission, eased tensions for a time and helped win some concessions for the Jesuits. But relations between the government and the missionaries took a turn for the worse when the war began. Soon the ecclesiastical administration of the islands was placed under Japanese control: Bishop Ideguchi of Yokohama was named administrator in 1941 and served in this capacity until his death en route to Hong Kong in 1943; his successor, Bishop Toda, was administrator less than a year before he was assassinated in Japan for trying to reclaim churches the military had taken over.

Meanwhile, the restrictions on the Jesuits working in Palau tightened after the outbreak of World War II in December 1941, and soon they were confined to Koror. There the Jesuits spent the next three years doing what pastoral work they could with the assistance of devoted helpers like Indalecio Rudimch, Francisco Delong, Joseph Tellei and the



Three Jesuits from Palau killed during the war: [top] Fr. Marino de la Hoz; [middle] Fr. Elias Fernandez; [bottom] Br. Emilio del Villar

Polloi family. When the American bombing raids began in the summer of 1944, the church and rectory in Koror became a refuge for Palauans in the vicinity. Then, in late July, the Japanese military police ordered the three Jesuits to evacuate the mission quarters, and the buildings were converted into a temporary military barracks. The Jesuits were brought to Ngatpang where, together with three of their co-religious who had been working on Yap, they were installed in a small house and placed under guard.

At the end of the summer, Japanese military authorities, knowing that an American invasion was imminent, moved the six Jesuits to another, more secure hideaway in Babeldaob. The priests managed to smuggle notes out to some of their lay leaders requesting sweet potatoes, coconuts and items of clothing. The people helped when they could, although the location of the detention camp was a matter of secrecy. By late September the Palauan people had lost all contact with their missionaries, and word leaked out from the military police that the Jesuits had been executed. Rudimch could find no sign of the priests or their quarters when he brought them food and clothing from Koror. In answer to his inquiries about the Jesuits, he was simply told "the matter of the priests is ended".

After the war, the Japanese military command claimed that the six Jesuits and a Filipino-Chamorro family from Yap were sent to the Philippines in September 1944 on a transport that was torpedoed and sunk. Although this story was easily disproved, the exact fate of the missionaries is still unclear. It seems that in mid-September they were whisked off on a truck to some deserted spot where they were either beheaded or shot, then buried in a mass grave. Their bodies, like the details of their death, have never been discovered.

Post-War Revival

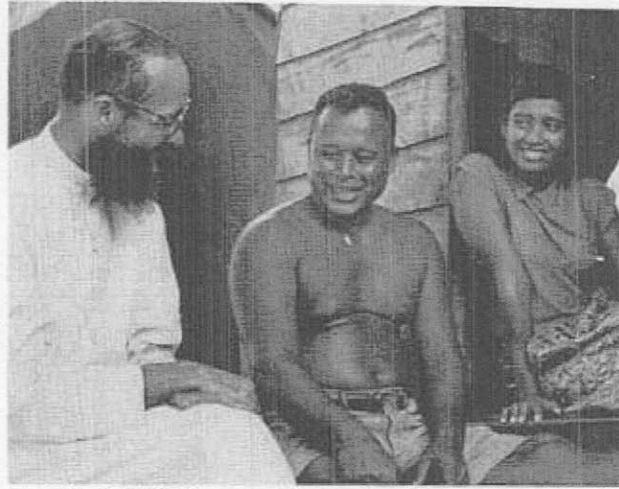
Palauan Catholics, like those in other parts of the mission, were forced to nurture their faith under trying circumstances and without the sacraments during the war. For more than a year after Japan's surrender, as they rebuilt their homes and reorganized their lives, they remained without the assistance of priests. Then,

in December 1946, two Spanish Jesuit missionaries arrived: Fr. Juan Bizkarra and Br. Juan Ariceta, both of whom had been in Japan since before the war. Fr. Bizkarra had visited Japan in 1938 to learn Japanese before taking up his permanent assignment in Palau, but the outbreak of the war had kept him there. Br. Ariceta had been assisting the Jesuit Procurator in Tokyo throughout the 1930s.

The Jesuits found the mission premises stamped with the traces of recent Japanese military occupation. Although the cement church was intact except for the portion of the sacristy destroyed by a bomb, the bells had been taken down and the confessional, pews and statues destroyed so that the church looked like the barracks it had been in the later years of the war. Only the walls remained of the residence, and church furnishings and missionary belongings were scattered all over the interior of the building. For their first few weeks in Palau the two Jesuits were obliged to stay with the Rudimch family. But whatever material inconveniences they had to put up with, the Jesuits had the consolation of witnessing over 400 people attend the Christmas mass Fr. Bizkarra offered only days after their arrival. Palauan Catholics, after having suffered years of spiritual deprivation, hungered for the devotional life they had known before.

The visit of Fr. Edwin McManus a month earlier only confirmed this fact. Fr. McManus, assigned to Truk but sent on an inspection tour of the mission, found an intense devotion among Catholics. Everywhere the people were coming to church in unprecedented numbers to recite the rosary, counting the Hail Marys on their fingers since they had no rosary beads. McManus spent over a week in Babeldaob visiting one community after another, hearing confessions for most of the day, blessing marriages and baptizing, and saying mass the next morning before setting out for another village. Attendance at the weekday mass in Koror was about a hundred, and the church was filled in the evenings for rosary and night prayers. The post-war fervor was all that earlier missionaries had worked for and longed for so desperately.

Fr. Bizkarra continued making the rounds of the Catholic communities, especially those on Angaur and Peleliu, over the next several months. When he was not on pastoral visits, the priest was



Fr. Ed McManus with a young Palauan couple

supervising the repair of the churches, with materials donated by the US military. By the summer of 1947, repair work was completed on the Koror church and the rebuilding of the rectory was well underway. Now the mission staff could turn its attention to the churches in Babeldaob that had been ruined in the war. When Fr. Vincent Kennally, the new Apostolic Administrator of the mission, paid his first visit to Palau in June 1947, he was gratified at the progress but awed at the work that remained to be done. To provide local language materials to nourish the faith life of the people, Kennally arranged for the reprinting of an old bible history and a devotionalary composed by earlier missionaries. He also announced that the Caroline-Marshalls mission would be entrusted to the American Jesuits. A few months later, in November, Palau received its first American missionary, Fr. Harry Furay.

The task of rebuilding continued during these transitional times. A large quonset hut from military surplus was set up near the Koror church and used for catechism classes, choir practice, and church meetings. Work was then begun on the renovation of the old German-built convent, for these missionaries, like their predecessors, were quick to understand the importance that

education held for the Palauan people they hoped to evangelize. Even the sudden departure of Fr. Furay after less than a year in the mission did not halt progress. Fr. Ed McManus was sent to Palau in August 1948 to help out on what was expected to be a temporary basis. A year later his assignment was made permanent and, after a short trip back to Truk to finish his affairs there, McManus became the local Jesuit superior and soon afterwards the pastor of Koror as well. In the meantime, Palau picked up another priest in the person of Fr. Thomas Lewis, who was given charge of Babeldaob, while Fr. Bizkarra was made pastor of Angaur and Peleliu. With this increase in the number of priests, the Jesuits could now venture to places like Kayangel, which had hitherto been visited by only one other priest. There McManus found two Catholics, baptized years before, conducting Sunday prayer services for twenty other non-Christians who wanted to become Catholics. A Palauan catechist was sent to prepare the people for baptism, which some received a few months later.

Indeed, Palauans played a large but generally unsung role in the rebuilding of their own post-war church. Maria Obkal, affectionately called "Mamang", led daily rosary and evening prayers in Koror for years, and taught catechism to public school students three times a week. She as much as any one person epitomized what a dedicated lay person could contribute to the pre-Vatican church. An equally zealous woman, Maria Asuncion Elsei, became known as the catechist for Babeldaob during those same years. Strong-willed by temperament and afire with her faith, Asuncion tirelessly trekked from one village to another like one of the early apostles, instructing and encouraging her fellow Christians. During her final days when she was housebound, she continued her ministry with those who came to see her and would never tire of telling the visiting priest that she was spending her time praying for him and her people. Another woman, Natalia Mekurur, spent much of her time ministering to the people of Ollei. She also made excursions to other places to help in church work, often with food and monetary support provided by Joseph Ngiradelemel, whose zeal was the equal of hers. There were others who contributed to the task of building the church over

these years: Cesario Ngeluk and Francisco Delong, who served as catechists when they were not doing carpentry work for the church; Bernardino Rdulaol, who directed the church choir for years; and Emiliano Ingereklii, the pilot of the mission boat *Javier*.

The arrival of three Maryknoll sisters in September 1948 was a much heralded event, for it meant that a Catholic school could



Mother Concepcion, Mercedarian Superior, on a visit to Palau in 1953, with Sr. Marya Celine, MM

be opened for the first time since 1915. Formal instruction had already begun a year or two earlier, however, when a young Palauan woman soon to enter the Mercedarians started teaching kindergarten and first grade to children in the quonset hut. Sr. Loretta Marie Hoffman, Sr. Camillus Reynolds and Sr. Andrew Marie McIver were installed in the old convent, now refurnished and repainted with Navy surplus. The Maryknoll convent, which was demolished just a few years ago, had a fascinating history of its own. Built by the German Capuchins in 1911 to house the Franciscan sisters and renovated by Spanish Jesuits in the 1930s, the building

was used as a restaurant for a time until the Japanese converted it, during the war, into the military police headquarters. It was presumably from this building that orders were issued for the execution of the six Jesuits slain in 1944.

While the sisters settled into their residence, the jumbo quonset hut that would serve as the original Mindszenty School was being readied for use. A cement floor was laid, the building partitioned into classrooms, and a second deck installed so that the upper section could serve as a girls dormitory. The notion of locating

the dormitory on the second floor was quickly discarded, however, when part of the upper deck collapsed during a Christmas pageant sending over a hundred people tumbling ten feet to the ground.

Even before the alterations were finished, the Maryknoll sisters began teaching regular classes to kindergarten and first grade students each morning between 7:30 and 11:00. In the afternoons they taught catechism and English to public school students, and sometimes held choir practice for boys as well. Three evenings a week they ran religious education for women and girls. During summers the sisters made extended visits to villages in other parts of Palau to run catechetical classes for children and youth. Even with the resumption of Catholic education, the traditional emphasis on catechetical work among the young continued.



Mindszenty School students parade past community center

As the school expanded, so did the number of teaching sisters. A fourth Maryknoller was added in early 1949, and the community grew to five or six in a few years. Blessed almost as an afterthought in February 1950, Mindszenty School was in full operation by that time with 200 students divided into three sections. So great was the clamor of parents to have their children enrolled that plans were made to double the capacity by the next school year. Under pressure from Catholic families, Mindszenty's rationale changed almost overnight—from a select seedbed for island catechists to a Catholic education for the general population.

By the fall of 1950, the school had expanded to six full grades even though the enrollment had not been increased. The problem was not so much lack of facilities as a shortage of teachers. Two Palauans were already working with the sisters in the school, but additional qualified teachers could not be found. A step forward was taken, nonetheless, when two dormitories were opened, each with about 30 boarders: St. Joseph's for boys and Holy Rosary for girls.



Palauan girls en route to Pohnpei to enter Mercedarians

Meanwhile, churches were being built and parish organization revived throughout Palau. Angaur and Peleliu, islands that had been all but leveled during the war, boasted new churches by 1950, and the community of Angaur built a comfortable wooden rectory for its new pastor, Fr. Juan Bizkarra. The 40 Catholics in Aimeliik, who had always wanted someplace to pray, had a quonset chapel blessed in March 1949. A new church was also dedicated in Ngaraard two years later. The church-building fever reached its height when a Chamorro on the tiny island of Ngerchur, the only inhabitant of that place, invited one of the priests to bless his own tiny church. The "church" was nothing more than part of the cave in which he lived, but 200 non-Christians attended the dedication and were treated to an explanation of Catholicism along with the customary feast.

The religious fervor sweeping the islands soon spilled over into vocations. As early as 1948, a young woman from Angaur, Elena Ebud, had manifested her desire to become a sister. Two years later, she and Johanna Tellei from Melekeok entered the postulancy for the Mercedarian sisters on Pohnpei. In June 1951, six Palauan boys left for the Philippines, where four were to begin studies for the priesthood at San Jose Seminary and two were to enter Novaliches as candidates for the Jesuit brotherhood. All but one of the six were members of Mindszenty's first graduating class of a month earlier. A year later four more Palauan boys went off to the seminary, and in 1954 alone 14 young Palauans, ten of them girls, went off to begin religious life. One of these was a young high school graduate by the name of Felix Yaoch, who entered the Jesuit novitiate in the Philippines. Still others like Augusta Ramarui and Maria Obkal devoted some years of their lives to teaching in the school and were instrumental in the early success of Mindszenty.

The next year or two saw personnel changes in the mission staff. When Fr. Kennally was transferred to the Philippines, Fr. McManus was appointed the new Jesuit mission superior. Although his responsibilities were enlarged, he still resided in Koror and continued his work in Palau. Some months later, Fr. Tom Lewis was obliged to leave the mission for health reasons. He was replaced a year later by Fr. John McCarthy, who had been working in the Marshalls. By 1952, three of the first four Maryknoll sisters assigned to Palau had been transferred to other parts of the mission. Among their replacements were Sr. Katherine George Razwad and Sr. Francis Xavier McMahan, each of whom spent several years in Palau.

When Bishop Thomas Feeney made his pastoral visit to Palau in June 1952, four months after his consecration, the occasion was a memorable one. This was the first episcopal visit to Palau in nearly 30 years, and the church and its environs were so crowded that many of the non-Catholics who were invited to the celebration could not get near the church. It was an exuberant time for the church of Palau. After years of painfully slow growth and frustrating collision with cultural values, Catholicism finally



An episcopal visit to the Ngaraard church

seemed to have won an enthusiastic acceptance in Palau. Catholics, who then numbered 2500, were growing by more than 100 a year and would total 3600 by the end of the decade. The churches (or at least those that had been rebuilt by this time) were filled, the missionary staff was growing, and vocations were flowering. Elizabeth, a 70-year old woman from Aimeliik, trudged to summer catechetics class each evening to hear the Maryknoll Sisters speak of the faith. The strength of desire that she and others like her showed symbolized the church of those early, post-war years.

Three priests were too few to do all that was expected of them during the mid-50s. Fr. John McCarthy was entrusted with the pastoral care of northern Babeldaob, but could not reside there or even say mass there on Sundays since a second priest was required to handle the masses in Koror which were multiplying as church attendance grew. Even though the fervor in Koror made it necessary to deny the outlying stations the service they had once enjoyed, the Babeldaob Catholics continued building and renovating their churches. The church in Melekeok was hastily rebuilt after the old building partially collapsed during mass one Sunday in 1954. Two other communities started construction of their churches at about the same time, and the Ngarchelong church

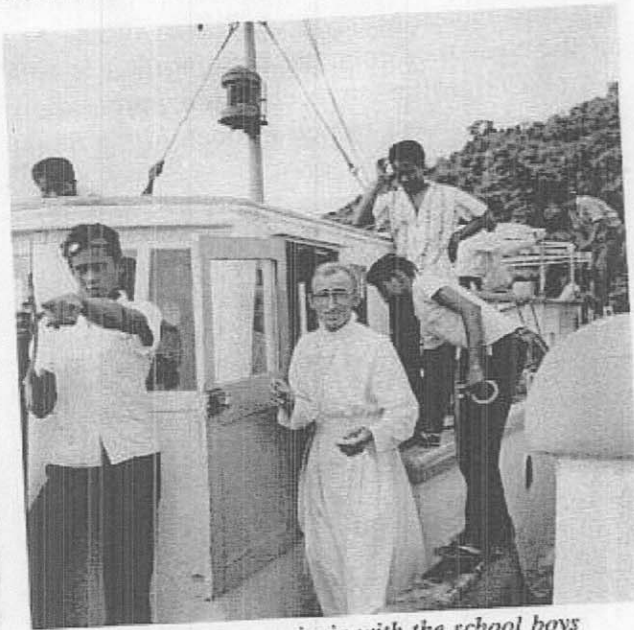
was being rebuilt in Ollei in 1958. Even if there were no services on Sundays in the villages, mass attendance on First Fridays was very good and there was a seemingly endless stream of converts to be instructed. Fr. McManus, who was now frequently off island in his capacity as mission superior, was teaching classes to converts three evenings a week.

Mindszenty School, during these early years, exercised an influence far greater than its size. The school continued its catechetical outreach through the summer programs run by the Maryknoll Sisters and through dramas like "Our Lady of Guadalupe", presented a total of eight times in 1955 and carried to nearly each major village of Palau. Mindszenty may never have become the training ground for village catechists that some of the missionaries envisioned, but it made its mark in other ways. The school continued to generate vocations in surprising numbers through the early 60s. Of the 22 Palauans who joined the Mercedarians throughout these years, 17 were Mindszenty graduates. Even if many of the young men and women traveling off to convent or seminary eventually dropped out, they often enough returned to devote a few years to teaching in the Catholic school before going on to government employment. Mindszenty also produced the first and many of the succeeding groups of boys chosen to attend Xavier, the newly opened mission-wide high school in Truk.

Catholic education took another step forward when Maris Stella was opened as an elementary school in the fall of 1957. With the founding of this new school for grades 1-6, Mindszenty could become an intermediate school (grades 7-9), as junior high schools were then called. The Jesuits had awaited the establishment of a Mercedarian community since the 1920s to help in the education of the young, but in recent years a Mercedarian-run school offered additional attraction for the missionaries in Palau. Two of the Palauan women who had pioneered in Catholic education after the war, Sr. Elena and Sr. Johanna, had taken the Mercedarian habit and would undoubtedly attract new vocations when they began teaching among their own people. Although the immigration status of the Spanish sisters delayed the Mercedarians'

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arrival, Maris Stella was opened in September 1957 with a Maryknoll sister serving as principal and six lay teachers comprising the faculty. Nearly two years later the four Mercedarians, Srs. Angelica Salaverria and Carmen Arteche along with the two Palauan sisters, finally appeared to take over the operation of the school. For a time classes were held in part of the parish hall, but Maris Stella soon inherited the old quonset hut after Mindszenty moved into new buildings across the road from the church. By 1959 the Catholic Church had an education complex that extended from kindergarten through 9th grade and enrolled 550 students from all over Palau.



Br. Juan Ariceta on a picnic with the school boys

The assignment of two new priests to Palau, Fr. Richard Roszel in 1955 and Fr. Richard Hoar three years later, allowed the missionaries to plan for expansion despite Fr. John McCarthy's return to the Marshalls in 1956. With

the two new Jesuits to handle the Koror parish and some of the closer out-stations, Fr. McManus, whose term as Jesuit mission superior had ended, was free to turn his full pastoral attention to Babeldaob. When he moved there to live in 1959, he became the first resident pastor since the early 1920s to do so. Rather than situate his residence in Melekeok, as others before him had done, he decided to carve a new mission station out of the spiritual

wilderness, choosing a distant hamlet in Ngaraard as his site in the hope of making converts among its largely non-christian population. Barely a year after his move, he opened a school and laid plans for a convent to house the sisters he hoped to get to teach in the school. Fr. John had similar hopes for Angaur, but neither received their nuns. The Ngaraard school peaked at a disappointing enrollment of 75 and had to be closed eight years later.

Meanwhile, Frs. Hoar and Roszel were busy supervising the construction of new school facilities in Koror to replace the crowded and antiquated quonsets. Fr. Roszel oversaw the work on the two new buildings into which Mindszenty moved, while Fr. Hoar began work on the two-story concrete building that is still being used for Maris Stella. Enrollments swelled and a procession of young Palauan Mercedarian sisters passed through Maris Stella in the early 60s.

Srs. Martha Ramarui, Sabina Basilius, Jacinta Marsil, Justina and Micaela Udui, and Bernadette King were among those who contributed to the school during this period. As the new school buildings were completed, that venerable jumbo quonset hut that had served as the original classroom building found a new function as an



Construction of Maris Stella School under Fr. Hoar

auditorium-gymnasium.

Parish organizations, too, were created or revived at this time. The Society of St. Camilus, the Catholic women's organization that has played such a leading role in parish life, was formed in 1958 and took on as its first project fund-raising for new windows in the church. The Society of San Ignacio provided a means for the men to deepen their own spirituality and help reconcile to the church those Christians who had drifted away from religious practice. The Society of San Francisco, composed of men and women, assisted in the liturgical life of the parish, sponsored parish activities, raised money for church renovation, and remains still one of the most active groups. The lay teachers at the schools had their own opportunities for educational growth, especially through the training program that was offered each summer and taught at times by Jesuit scholastics working at Xavier.

Building a Palauan Church

In February 1964, an event occurred that represented a momentous step forward for the church of Palau. Amid an enormous gathering in Koror that was attended by Catholic leaders and priests from as far off as Pohnpei, Gregorio Ramarui was ordained the first Palauan priest. Although Gregorio left the priesthood two years later, his achievement was an important one: the sacerdotal color and cultural barrier was broken. Three years later, Fr. Felix Yaoch was ordained in Buffalo in the presence of his mother and a handful of Palauan well-wishers, and a year after that he was back in Palau to begin the years of dedicated service he has given since then. Another Palauan, Cypriano Moses, returned as a Jesuit brother, pronounced his final vows, but died an untimely death a few years later. The number of vocations to the sisterhood continued to grow, in the meantime; by 1964 there were about 30 Palauan Mercedarians.

During the 1960s, the church in Palau, as everywhere else, faced the task of renewal in keeping with the changes emanating from Vatican II. Not only did the church in Palau have to accommodate the local culture (something on which the Council insisted), but it had to do so according to the new (or

rediscovered) norms governing the church's mission to the world. With their construction behind them, pastors now concentrated on reshaping their church communities. They organized study groups and attempted to draw lay people into more active leadership roles. A group of men worked closely with Fr. Hoar between 1965 and 1971 to put out a parish paper and produce weekly Catholic radio programs. This group included Sylvester Alonz, Juan Polloi, Tony Polloi, and David Ramarui. In later years the group expanded to include many others, and the radio programs they produced broadened to embrace topics related to human and social development issues. The prayer groups that were later organized in Koror and some of the other villages had the same general thrust. While aimed at deepening the prayer life of their members, they offered them a chance to reflect on the relevance of their faith to the problems of family and society.

Styles were rapidly changing in what had long appeared to be an unchanging church. Sisters gradually shed their religious dress, sometimes over the strong objections of clergy and laity, and priests too wore their habits much less frequently. Br. Joe Griffin, who worked in Palau for eight years, had a much different role than Br. Juan had before him; he was an administrator, buyer, teacher and treasurer rather than cook, repairman and dormitory prefect. In the few years Fr. Tom Flavin worked in Palau before his transfer to Guam and his



Fr. Felix in front of newly renovated Koror church

tragic death in Palau by drowning in 1976, he developed a special ministry among the youth. Besides his parish duties, he worked as a counsellor at Palau High School and in his off-hours could be found nearly anywhere the young might congregate, even in the nightclubs.

The death of Fr. McManus in 1969 meant the loss of Palau's most experienced foreign missionary. Yet, just a year before this, Fr. Felix began his priestly ministry among his own people. His ministry has been distinguished perhaps not so much by what he has done as by how he has done it. Palauan Catholics recognized in him a quiet and steady leadership inspired by an unostentatious faith and a pride in Palau. With him since 1975, and in his shadow (as must be the case in such combinations), has worked Fr. Tom Smith, who was for a time director of the two schools and is now pastor of the Koror parish. Other foreign Jesuits, as also Mercedarians and Maryknollers, have come for shorter periods to contribute to the building of the Palauan church. They have worked alongside such persons as Sr. Christina Imeong, who gave nearly 20 years of dedicated service to her people.

The 1970s proved to be a tumultuous time for Catholic education in Palau. In 1973, as Mindszenty School was being converted into a full four-year high school, the Maryknoll Sisters withdrew from Palau. Since then the high school has had a largely Palauan faculty and during much of this time has been headed by a lay principal. Maris Stella, which was expanding to a full eight grades, was helped in its transition by the leadership of Sr. Martha Ramarui and has been staffed almost entirely by Palauan teachers. The gradual loss of unpaid religious faculty members and the improvements made in the public school system challenged the superiority of the Catholic schools in Palau as in other parts of the Trust Territory. As tuition fees climbed, enrollments tapered off and then fell sharply. From a high of over 600 pupils in 1967 the enrollment of Maris Stella dropped to slightly over 200 in 1984, before the numbers began to rise again. It was not until the mid-80s that both schools stabilized in enrollment: Maris Stella's at nearly 300, and Mindszenty's at about 130.

But formal education has been only a part of the total church program in recent years. Frs. Felix and Smith, in collaboration with the Protestant churches, have assisted in the revision of the Palauan bible. The church's media work has received more attention than ever since the arrival of Fr. Amal in 1983. In a beautiful new media studio erected in 1986, he and his coworkers have begun producing video documentaries on religious and social



Br. Cypriano Moses at work in the Jesuit Bureau, Buffalo

themes, while continuing the weekly radio programs aired each Sunday. A ministries training program was recently initiated to prepare Catholics for different forms of church service. The prayer groups founded by Fr. Hoar over ten years ago continued to

nurture the faith of their members long after Fr. Hoar's departure from the mission. In the *osiaol* next to the church, which long ago replaced the parish hall quonset, are held weekly bible classes, reflection weekends, and parish meetings of all kinds, not to mention the social affairs that are so vital to the spirit of the parish. Symbolic perhaps of the shift in ministries was the renovation of the Spanish-built Sacred Heart Church in Koror during the late 1970s. Using the shell of a building erected 40 years earlier, the people fashioned a modern church that was more suitable for modern devotions and yet retained touches of the old.

The church's educational work has touched the very culture and language of the people. It was the early German and Spanish missionaries, after all, who produced the first body of written

material in Palauan and outer island languages. As they did so, they assisted in the creation of a writing system. A few made significant contributions towards the description and understanding of the Palauan language. Building on the early work of Fr. Salvator Walleser, Fr. Ed McManus spent years compiling a Palauan dictionary that was published posthumously in 1977.

Population movements since the 60s have half-emptied the villages of Babeldaob, making it impractical to station a full-time priest on that island. Emphasis in recent years has been on train-



Jesuit Novitiate in Koror, opened in 1987

ing local leaders to minister to the needs of their own villages, with a priest making occasional pastoral rounds of the island.

Although the vocation boom in the 1950s has long since ended, the emphasis on local vocations has not. As John Paul Ililau prepares for ordination to the priesthood, other Palauan seminarians in Fiji and Guam are in more distant stages of training for the same goal. The opening of the new Jesuit novitiate in Koror in 1987 under Fr. Felix has been a vivid reminder of the importance of local church leadership, and two of the five young

Ramarui, herself one of the early Palauan vocations, has served since 1982 as the directress of formation in Saipan for girls entering the Mercedarians. Their efforts, together with those of the uncelebrated lay leaders working to deepen and mature the faith of their people, are ushering the church of Palau into a new age: the century of the truly Palauan church.

*The Catholic Church in Micronesia**American Jesuits*

Fr. Harry B. Furay	1947-1948	Fr. Robert O'Connell	1965-1968
Fr. Edwin McManus	1949-1969 +	Fr. Thomas Flavin	1967-1968
Fr. Thomas Lewis	1949-1952		1972-1973
Fr. John McCarthy	1953-1956	Fr. Thomas Smith	1975-present
Fr. Ralph O'Neil	1953-1953	Fr. Antony Amalanathan	1984-present
Fr. Richard Roszel	1955-1968;		
	1974-1975	Br. Joseph Griffin	1964-1973
Fr. Francis Cosgrove	1957-1958	Br. Francis Butler	1973-1974
Fr. Richard Hoar	1958-1981	Br. Walter Eckler	1986-1987

Micronesian Jesuits

Fr. Felix Yaoch	1968-present	Vidalino Jones	1987-1988
Br. Cypriano Moses	1965-1966	Kenneth Urumolog	1988-1990
Juan Ngiraibuuch	1987-1989	Wayne Tkcl	1990-present
John Akapito	1987-1989		

Diocesan Priests

Fr. Gregorio Ramarui	1964-1966	Fr. John Paul Ililau	1990-present
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Maryknoll Sisters

Sr. Camillus Reynolds	1948-1960	Sr. Margaret (Margaret George) Stumpf	1955-1966
Sr. Loretta Marie Hoffman	1948-1952;	Sr. Joan (Teresa Francis) Carroll	1956-1965
	1958-1961;	Sr. Jose Maria Brown	1961-1965
	1965-1969;	Sr. Fidelis Dorsch	1962-1965
	1971-1973	Sr. Ann (John Marion) Dowling	1965-1966
Sr. Emily (Andrew Marie) Melver	1948-1950	Sr. Patricia (Grace Patrick) Fitzgerald	1966-1967
Sr. Therese (Marya Celine) de Meulenaere	1949-1958	Sr. Robert Marie King	1965-1972
Sr. Madelon Marie Mullen	1950-1952	Sr. Maria Florence Giambalvo	1967-1971
Sr. Joanne (Francis Xavier) McMahon	1952-1957;	Sr. Marilyn Jean Graef	1969-1973
	1958-1960;		
	1961-1964		
Sr. Katherine George Razwad	1952-1957;		
	1965-1967		

PERSONNEL

Spanish Capuchins

Fr. Antonio de Valencia	1891-1892	Br. Joaquin de Masamagrell	1891-1893
Fr. Luis de Granada	1891-1903+	Br. Oton de Ochovi	1891-1898+
Fr. Toribio de Filiel	1893-1897	Br. Eulogio de Quintanilla	1893-1906
Fr. Silvestre de Santibañez	1897-1906	Br. Peregrin de Moncada	1897-1899
Fr. Cristobal de Canals	1903-1906	Br. Eustaquio de Vidaurre	1898-1906

German Capuchins

Fr. Raymund Laile	1906-1909	Br. Ivo Appelmann	1907-1913
Fr. Salvator Walleser	1907-1912	Br. Sebald Trenkle	1907-1910
Fr. Callistus Lopinot	1909-1909; 1913-1913	Br. Fridolin Hütler	1907-1908
Fr. Basilius Graf	1910-1915	Br. Kleophas Kiefer	1909-1915
Fr. Placidus Müller	1911-1915	Br. Donulus Tepelden	1910-1912
Fr. Wunibald Fechter	1913-1915	Br. Nilus Kampling	1912-1912
		Br. Vitalis Mertesacker	1913-1915

German Franciscan Sisters

Sr. Lotharia Müller	1909-1913	Sr. Adelina Knörr	1913-1915
Sr. Josefa Lehmann	1909-1911	Sr. Bernardina Schmidt	1913-1915
Sr. Godoleva Müller	1909-1910	Sr. Paula Krauth	1913-1915
Sr. Dona Hafner	1911-1913	Sr. Columba Stoll	1913-1915
Sr. Natalia Paulus	1911-1913	Sr. Aloysia Fettig	1913-1915
Sr. Hermanna Simon	1911-1913		

Spanish Jesuits

Fr. Indalecio Llera	1921-1924	Br. Jose Mauricio Gogenola	1921-1924
Fr. Marino de la Hoz	1921-1944+	Br. Emilio del Villar	1921-1944+
Fr. Eduardo Rodés	1925-1926	Br. Gregorio Ruiz	1926-1929
Fr. Elias Fernandez	1926-1944+	Br. Celestino Obispo	1933-1935
Fr. Juan Bizkarra	1946-pres	Br. Juan Ariceta	1946-1965

CHURCHES

Sacred Heart, Koror Founded on April 28, 1891. The church was destroyed in the 1927 typhoon; it was rebuilt of cement and dedicated on Easter 1935. The structure was renovated in 1976.

St. Joseph, Ngarchelong Founded on April 23, 1893, but closed soon afterward. The church was relocated in Ngatmel in 1911. It was reestablished in Ollei in 1958 and renamed *St. Patrick*. A few years later it was closed and the materials used for the Ngkeklaui church.

St. Joseph, Melekeok Founded on March 28, 1903. It was moved, rebuilt of cement, renamed *Pieta* and dedicated on March 19, 1939. Church was rebuilt in 1954, and rebuilt again in the early 1970s.

St. Ignatius, Aimeliik Founded in 1911, but abandoned soon afterwards. Rebuilt of quonset and dedicated on March 12, 1949. Construction of a new church was begun in 1960 but never finished.

Unnamed church in Airai was founded in 1911, but closed a few years later.

Our Lady of Mercy, Ngiwal Founded in 1912, but soon abandoned.

Our Lady of the Rosary, Angaur Founded on October 23, 1921. Rebuilt in February 1927. Later moved, rebuilt in cement and wood and dedicated on December 8, 1940. Destroyed in the war and rebuilt by the US military in 1945.

Our Lady of Lourdes, Peleliu Founded about 1926. A new church was built and dedicated on March 25, 1950. It was rebuilt again and dedicated on February 8, 1975.

St. Joseph, Echang, Ngarkebesang Founded in October 1926, and repaired various times since. It was entirely rebuilt and dedicated on February 13, 1977.

St. Francis Xavier, Ngkeklaui, Ngaraard Founded in 1927. Rebuilt and dedicated on January 28, 1951. With materials from the old Ngarchelong church, it was rebuilt and dedicated on February 16, 1980.

Maria Pilar, Sonsorol Founded in August 1930.

An unnamed church on Tobi was founded in February 1931. ✓

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An unnamed church on **Pulo Ana**, built by non-Catholics but shared by Catholics, was put up in April 1974. It is now being rebuilt in cement.

Holy Family, Ngchesar Founded in the 1950s. It was rebuilt of cement in the late 1960s.

Infant Jesus, Ulimang, Ngaraard Founded in the 1950s. It was relocated in Elab and rebuilt of cement in May 1962.

McManus Memorial, Ngerbeched, Koror Founded in 1974.

Resurrection, Helen's Reef Founded on April 1975. ↙