

Martin and Marie Dicke—Missionaries Serving the Lord in Papua New Guinea

Memorizing the Good News in the Rainforests of Papua New Guinea

By Martin Dicke

We don't have to go very far in Papua New Guinea to find people who have been deeply influenced by my Uncle Bill, the Rev. Dr. Willard Burce, and his wife Elinor. Of course, that's not too surprising since they spent 40 years ministering here. In May 1948 he graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. On August 1st of that year he married Elinor Dicke and was later ordained. That November they came to PNG to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who had never heard it. 2018 is a year of 70th anniversaries for them. In some cases, they simply planted a seed, but were never able to fully witness the harvest. Having returned to the mission field myself, I am blessed to witness the harvest and although struggles remain, the harvest is plentiful.

On May 11-12 of this year I visited Waipi Lutheran Church in the Tarua Circuit for the second time. Waipi comes from the Enga phrase "Wai-pii" which means "Good News." The Tarua Circuit is in the Kompiam District north of Wabag smack dab in the middle of the tropical rain forests of the highlands. It



Above: Waipi Lutheran Church, on top of the knoll in the center and barely visible, is dwarfed by the mountains. Below: Isingi Kandaso, son of Kandaso who was the first man to be baptized in this region in 1964. From that baptism grew the Tarua Circuit which now consists of 12 strong congregations.



Above: Members of Waipi Lutheran Church in front of their church.

Below: A huge thunderhead rises up behind the cross and the evangelist's house at Waipi Lutheran Church. This district of 12 congregations has many evangelists, but only one pastor.



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is a good 3-4 hour drive from Timothy Lutheran Seminary, Birip on some very rough roads. The last section of the road is a 15 minute descent on a very steep, mostly clay road carved out of a mountainside. The only safe way to navigate this road is to let the truck crawl down in first gear in low 4-wheel drive praying that it doesn't rain.

There I met Isingi Kandaso (see other side). His father, Kandaso, was the first person to be baptized in this region. He was baptized at Layalam in the early 1960s. A missionary, who the people now remember only as Pastor Jim, began mission work there in the late 50s or early 60s. Sometime in 1964 the first baptism was held. Isingi told me that the first person to be baptized his father who was baptized by my Uncle Bill. His father then changed his name to

Kandaso which he said means, "the first to be baptized."

From the first baptism at Layalam grew an entire circuit of thousands of believers. Through some wise and faithful pastors such as Pastor Lipa Pawapen, who now teaches at Timothy Lutheran Seminary, and Pastor Lokali Yalao who was ordained by my Uncle Bill in 1994, the circuit developed a system of teaching the faith that focuses on three things (see T-shirt at right): 1) Baibel (Bible), 2) Litesi (Liturgy/Worship), 3) Katikism (Catechism). Despite few books and only one pastor for 12 congregations, the faith is passed on orally. With the assistance of many faithful evangelists, worship services are held regularly and the catechism is memorized and recited by everyone.

There is a plentiful harvest in Tarua! Thanks be to God!



Devotional Thought: The Power of the Oral Word

One of the most remarkable things about the Tarua Circuit of the Gutnius Lutheran Church is that despite only one pastor and very few books, every person can recite the Catechism from memory. Below are some thoughts from Martin Luther on the power of the spoken Word.

*The testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple.*

Psalm 19:7

Christ's kingdom is established...not with human force, wisdom, counsel or power, but with the Word and the Gospel

preached by infants and sucklings. ... Christ founds, strengthens, and fortifies His kingdom through the oral Word. By "infants" He does not mean young children who cannot talk (for if they are to speak the Word, they must be able to talk) but plain, simple, unsophisticated people, who are like infant children in that they set aside all reason, grasp and accept the Word with simple faith, and let themselves be led and directed by God like children. Such people are also the best scholars and pupils in Christ's kingdom, as He Himself says in Matthew 11:25: "I thank Thee,

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes." In Psalm 19:7 David says: "The testimony of the Lord makes wise the simple." And Psalm 119:130: "The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."

Martin Luther

From *Commentary on Psalm 8* (Luther's Works 12:108)

Taken from *Day-by-Day: 365 Devotional Readings from Martin Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, nd).

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