



Pohnpei Rejoices!

A Challenge to Bring Faith and Life Together

I have always believed that it is a part of the missionary vocation to gently challenge people. That challenge is always to bring our life and our faith closer together in our everyday life. Many times you can be challenged by friends that you have known for a long time. You can be with people and then suddenly see a whole new and deeper side of their personality, something that you had not seen so clearly before, that should be in your own life.

On Saturday, September 30, 2006, a group of men that I have been working with for a number of years processed into Our Lady of Mercy Church on Pohnpei and knelt before their fellow Micronesian, Bishop Amando Samo, to be ordained as permanent Deacons.

As the number of foreign missionaries decreases and the workers in the harvest are fewer, our Deacon program is based on the need to build a local Church with local people. They are men who have been trained through the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, and through theology, spirituality and liturgy courses over a number of years. They have been challenged to hear the call of Christ and to respond with a generous heart to the questions, "What have you done for Christ? What are you doing for Christ?" And now, the more powerful question, "What will you do for Christ?"



teachers in the Public School System for more than 20 years

Mikel Dano and Henry Donre, from UH, on the Eastern side of the island, have dedicated themselves as

and at the same time have been very involved in many ministries in their local parish.

Casiano Nennis, originally from the Mortlock Islands, South of Chuuk, was one of the first graduates of Ponape Agriculture and Trade School. He stayed on to work at the school and after many long years of service was the Chairman of Construction when the school had to close. He has continued his work in construction and the development of the island, working out of the same Construction Shop where he taught so many students. Part of his responsibility, even before his ordination, has been as the Administrator of a new parish community in the area of Lukopw, Madolenihmw.



Ioannes Tihpen

Another early graduate of PATS, Valentine Santiago, has become an expert in agriculture and now is working very closely with the Pohnpei Conservation Society, helping to safeguard God's gifts to

the people of Pohnpei. He, too, has already been appointed the administrator of his local parish, formerly directed by Jesuit Pastors, located on the grounds of the old PATS campus in Tamorohi, Madolenihmw.

The third new Deacon from that area, Ioannes Tihpen, is the son of one of our first Deacons who had served as a Pastor for many years before having to retire from the active ministry because of ill health.

Burdencio Andreas and Inosencio Eliam are from the western side of Pohnpei served by the parish church in Seinwar, Kittu.



Burdencio for many years worked in our Catholic schools in the Kitti Distract, in local government and then in personnel with a local fishing company. He now directs the Justice and Development work of the Vicariate of Pohnpei/Kosrae. Inos

for most of his life has been a volunteer catechist and a subsistence farmer.

The final new Deacon, Ponciano Sehpin, comes from the island of Sapwuahfik in the atoll of Ngatik, 90 miles south of Pohnpei. He has been preparing to take the place of the aging first Deacon Pastor on Sapwuahfik.



*Ponciano Sehpin
and Burdencio Andreas*

It is not easy to hear the call of Christ and to offer yourself for ministry. Since very early in their lives, Pohnpeians are taught not to put their heads above others and to stay mixed in the crowd. Saying “Yes to Christ” can look like you are stepping in front of others and leaving yourself open to judgment. Also, earlier in the history of the Church on Pohnpei, many left the island to study in seminaries for the priesthood but then decided that this was not their call. Local society had always branded them “failures.” For many years the feeling was that no Pohnpeian can ever be a priest!

After Vatican II, the emphasis on the role of the laity began to be part of the life of Pohnpean Catholics. The turning point came after a number of the early Deacon candidates were asked for the first time to preach in the pulpit of the principal church at a convocation of an important lay group on the island. People came out of the church that day saying for the first time, “You know, maybe we *can* do it!” It was an important turning point.

It is these men, their wives and families who are now challenging me to be a better man, a better Christian and a better Jesuit. They are listening to Christ in their own place and in their own time. They are finding new answers to the old Ignatian questions and they are offering a new and committed response. They are finding new ways to bring faith and life closer together.

Their challenge is greater, since it is still a new way of service and it is lived out very closely with people who know them very well. Christ tells us that a prophet is never accepted in his own place. The Deacons are often reminded that the family is their first obligation and that their work with prayer and reflection must first start in the family home. These homes become the examples of a new life and a “new Church” for the whole community.

Fr. Joseph A. Cavanagh, SJ