

## **How the Gospel came to Mortlock**

*By Tom Puaria, February 2021*

The people of Mortlock (Takuu) have always been known for their firm belief in spiritualism up to this day. After the introduction of Christianity some 40 years ago, a remnant of elderlies continue to observe spiritualistic rituals while the majority have switched to Christianity.

In the early 1950s, a Mission ship, MV St Michael, called in at Mortlock with a group of Catholic missionaries to introduce Christianity to the people. After their meeting with the people, the village Paramount Chief Apeo Manau told the missionaries that they would not accept the new religion and were comfortable with their own beliefs; therefore they were directed to return.

News of the rejection of Christianity on the island discouraged any further religious outreach on the island by any other denominations.

Up till the 1980s, students from the Polynesian atolls attending secondary school away from home were allowed by their respective schools to miss religious classes because of their own beliefs.

The few students who were converted at school could not congregated for fellowship meetings when they were home on the atolls for their Christmas breaks, because the people would not allow their homes to be used for fellowship gatherings. As a result, faith on the island did not take root.

In 1980, a primary school teacher from Port Moresby, Mr Godo Adu, taught in Mortlock and started the first Christian fellowship gathering at his home. The group grew in numbers and young people got saved every day. My wife Sharon and I were among the first converts and we were leaders of our fellowship group.

As a response to this revival, the village authorities started persecuting the young Christians. All members were brought before the Village Court and were sentenced to weeks of hard labour. (The same plight happened at the same time on Tasman island, where all Christians had their heads shaved and were punished.) As the leader of the fellowship group, I was ordered by the Village Court to stop preaching the Word.

Later I was escorted by Village Court officials to have my case heard at the District Court in Arawa, at that time the headquarters of Bougainville. My case was dismissed, however, and the Court ordered the release of all Christians convicted to hard labour on the island.

After that Christians began to worship freely, and they do so to this day. Sharon pastored the Church while I attended a 2 years course in 1984 at the PNG Institute of Evangelism at Port Moresby.

Seeing the need for a better understanding of the Word, I joined the translation team to have the Bible translated into the Takuu language. Later Sharon joined me in the translation work; leadership of the church was then handed over to younger Christians.

After the completion of the Takuu New Testament in 2010, the number of elderlies in the various churches on the island increased tremendously. Praise God!!