

The coming of the Gospel to Nuguria

By Tom Puaria, February 2021

Fead Islands, or locally known as Nuguria, is an atoll 120 nautical miles north of Buka Island in the Region of Bougainville. The Nuguria people are Polynesians, just like the Takuu and Nukumanu people in the same region. Nuguria atoll has a resident population of just over 1,000; about the same number of Nuguria people live in other parts of Papua New Guinea.

Like Mortlock (Takuu) and Tasman (Nukumanu), the Islanders rejected the early missionaries visiting the islands and requested the colonial authorities to ban missionaries from bringing in Christian influence to the islands.

When a number of Nugurians started joining churches outside their home island, they were prevented from congregating as a church when they went back to their island. However, by 1977, families of the SDA started having quiet fellowships in their homes in Buhuria (one of the islets of Nuguria).

In 1978 a newly converted Christian from the United Church, Late Matthew Tepape, started the first congregation having meetings at his house. Many islanders were converted and the group grew in numbers.

Because of the increasing number with limited space, the group decided to get material for a permanent church building. It was then that opposition from the Village Elders of Buhuria began: they stopped the group from building a church building, even to the extent of destroying the building materials.

Persecution of Christians went on for the next couple of years until 1982 when David Paukie's uncle, chief of the Hauma clan, gave the green light for the church to move to Hauma at the southern tip of Tehenua, the biggest islet.

The number of Christian converts increased and eventually, the Village Chiefs were converted as well. At that point, all persecutions ceased. The SDA and United Churches were then allowed to build their church buildings on Buhuria and Christians started to worship freely.

From the 3 Polynesian atolls in Bougainville, Nuguria was the first group to fully accept Christianity. Today four churches are present on the atoll: SDA, United Church, Catholic, and AOG.

Over the past years, a team of Nuguria people has worked on a translation of the New Testament in their own language. A trial edition of the Four Gospels in the Nuguria languages was launched on 1st January 2020.