

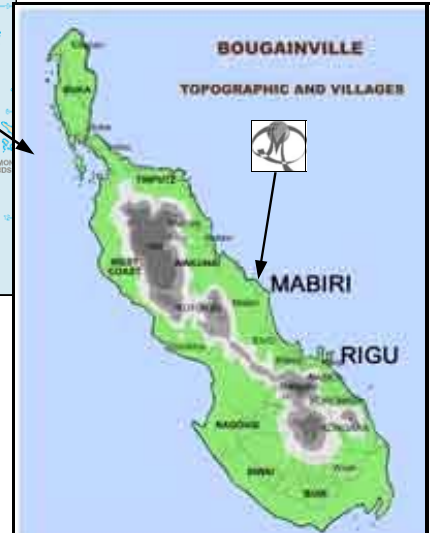


BOUGAINVILLE in PNG

St Joseph's Education and Rehabilitation Centre, Mabiri

Place:

Bougainville has, since 1989, been the scene of civil war which started over the control of a big copper mine in the centre of the island. There were many sides to the war and it resulted in a climate of distrust and suspicion. By 2001, peace had returned to Bougainville and rebuilding processes had to begin. Many young men had been soldiers of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) during the fighting and had begun their military career at the age of thirteen when they should have been starting high school. These ex-combatants are now the students of St Joseph's High School and Mabiri Vocational Centre, which together, form the St Joseph's Education and Rehabilitation Centre.



Marists:

Marists (sisters, brothers and priests) have been highly visible on Bougainville for a long time – the brothers since 1942. Three brothers lost their life there during World War 2. They were last seen being taken away by enemy soldiers.

This presence remains although the style is changing. PNG National brothers make up most of the community at Mabiri (Brothers John, Rodney, Simon and Bernard). Brother Ken is the only Australian and he leads the Centre. He is helped by a local lay staff and two volunteers from Australia – Brendan, a high school teacher, and Andrew, a tradesman cabinetmaker. It is through the support of Marist students in Australia that we have been able to recruit, train and send these volunteers.



Brother Ken, the leader of the project, witnessing Brother Simon's vows.

Young People:

Sixty students are high school students trying to start up again after being in the civil war. They are now in their 20s and have missed out in much of their education. They have to be ex-soldiers to gain entrance to St Joseph's and Brother Ken who has a Masters degree in Trauma Counselling supports them.

Another sixty are students of the Vocational Centre. They follow a practical course, which is designed to help them develop skills that will be of economic benefit to their communities when they return. They have built most of the school from nothing starting with the milling of their timber with a portable sawmill and finishing with the construction of dormitories, classrooms and teacher housing.

Funding:

Much of what has been achieved has been through the help of Government organisations (such as AusAID) and Non-Government Organisations (NGO's) from Australia and other countries. Marist students in Australia have been the initiators in providing the development funds necessary to help with this process. Without such generous help there would have been nothing for the larger funding agencies to see – nothing to support. We are asked to continue our partnership with the Marist students on Bougainville. Some Australian students have already been on an immersion experience to further develop their relationship with their fellow Marist students.



Brendan Joyce is a Marist Volunteer