

1980 Vanuatu: Part of Our Story, Part of the Story of World Mission Sunday

In 1980, the World Mission Sunday message from Saint Pope John Paul II highlighted the missionary nature of the Church and the responsibility shared by all Catholics to take part in its mission. This call was captured in the World Mission Sunday campaign of the time: **“The Church wish for herself to be truly missionary”**.

In Australia, this call took on a particular meaning through the 1980 World Mission Sunday Appeal, which focused on supporting the Church in Vanuatu, particularly on Pentecost Island.

On 5 August 1980, Bishop Francis Lambert, SM, from the Diocese of Port Vila, wrote a letter thanking the Catholics of Australia for their generous support, which was already making a tangible difference in the Diocese. Their contributions were helping to support the formation of catechists, as well as the construction of a new presbytery and the expansion of the church building in the Mission Outreach Station of Melsisi on Pentecost Island. As part of the 1980 World Mission Sunday Appeal, Bishop Francis invited Australian Catholics to renew their ongoing support for the people and Church of Vanuatu as the country entered this important new chapter in its history.

The letter came just a few days after Vanuatu declared independence. As the country entered this new chapter, Bishop Francis reflected on the challenges ahead, saying: **“What we need now is plenty of patience and also many prayers so that everyone will be ready to accept the other person and be ready through dialogue...to find the solutions to our many problems.”** He concluded his letter by asking Australian Catholics to pray for the people of Vanuatu as they **“emerge as a new nation.”**

His message was shared in the 1980 World Mission Sunday Appeal leaflet, inviting Catholics across Australia to keep the people of Vanuatu in their prayers and to offer their generous support as the country entered this new stage in its history.

Forty-six years after independence, Vanuatu has grown into a vibrant and resilient nation, with a developing and increasingly diverse economy, while continuing to navigate the challenges of a changing world.

In 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold devastated the Mission Outreach Station of Melsisi, dealing a significant setback to the community as they lost their local hospital, schools and church building. Today, they continue to rebuild, both their physical infrastructure and their community.

In 2025, the community witnessed 313 children reaffirm their faith through the sacrament of Confirmation, a powerful sign of hope and renewal as Melsisi continues to rebuild.

The story of the Mission Outreach Station of Melsisi is a reminder that the impact of World Mission Sunday extends far beyond a single appeal. The generosity and prayers

offered by Australian Catholics in 1980 helped strengthen a local Church at a pivotal moment in Vanuatu's history. More than four decades later, this relationship continues, as the Pontifical Mission Societies, through its network, continue to support the Diocese of Port Vila and its communities, responding to changing needs and helping them rebuild, grow and create hope for future generations.

Additional visuals:

<https://files.catholicmission.org.au/images/uploads/1980-WMS-appeal-1.jpg>

<https://files.catholicmission.org.au/images/uploads/1980-WMS-appeal-2.jpg>

<https://files.catholicmission.org.au/images/uploads/1980-WMS-appeal-3.jpg>