

# **A CHRISTIAN YOUTH LIFE IN BUANG TRADITION**

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## **Introduction**

As an ex-youth leader, and a member of a youth group from the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG), I came to be familiar with youth ministry, and its structure within ELC-PNG. In my experience, I came to realise a number of problems in youth ministry. Many of these problems are directly, or indirectly, related to the youth structure itself, which is a Western-oriented one, initiated largely by some missionaries.

It is not my intention to state here that the ELC-PNG youth structure is a failure. Rather, this structure needs adjustments, and changes, to make it really effective. Moreover, this type of Western-oriented structure has its problems. The present youth structure is suitable mostly for the urban areas, whereas the rural areas have had some difficulties in coping with it.

Therefore, I am suggesting that there should be an alternative youth structure, besides the present one – a locally-oriented youth structure – which can be relevant for ELC-PNG youth ministries, if not as a whole, then, especially, for rural youth ministries.

My aim here is to compare the aims of traditional Buang youth life with biblical terms, or aims, of youth life, and to develop an alternative Christian youth structure, which can benefit Buang youth ministry, and ELC-PNG youth ministry as a whole.

## **1. The Aims and Objectives of Traditional Buang Youth Life**

Information on traditional Buang youth life was documented during my research done in the Buang area, between June 18 to 24, 1996. I interviewed a total number of 14 people (13 males and one female), all comprising village leaders, and senior men, who were good story-keepers. These people contributed information on past traditional Buang youth life, as well as present Buang youth life. From the group of 14 people who were interviewed, the four most reliable ones were chosen to again check, finalise, and approve the information, which is presented here. The names of these four people are: Neo Ganjez Wang (age 64, male), village story-keeper; Adam Patun (age 55, male), village story-keeper; Giusa Katapsa (age 54, male), village leader; and Lucas Yalang (age 43, male) senior man.

### **Background of the Buang People**

The Buang people live on the mountain ranges, which extend along the Snake River in the Snake River valley. It is about 50 kilometres west of Lae city.

There are about 7,000 people living in approximately 30 major villages. The dialects spoken are classed into two major ones, the upper Buang dialect, and the lower Buang dialect. The Buang people are a peace-loving and obedient people. They labour hard to survive, by gardening and hunting – and they have been successful gardeners and hunters for a very long time.

For the Buang, the life pattern of an individual must count for the benefit of the community as a whole. From childhood to adulthood, an individual's life is interwoven within the community, sustaining the name and dignity of the community. So, the life of the young ones depends on the community, and is developed by the community, where, in adult age, they will play significant roles in, and for, the community.

### **Youth Life in Early Childhood**

At the age of five to six years, the children start to participate in family activities. Usually, the son accompanies the father to perform male tasks, while the daughter follows her mother to participate in the

female tasks. The separation of the sexes is a practice, which one must follow, at certain times, until one is married.

From this stage of childhood, the children start gaining some first-hand experience, by watching, and getting practically involved, in their parent's activities. The boys start learning skills, from tasks, such as chopping trees, making a garden fence, or building a house. The girls learn from their mother ways of gardening, nut gathering, preparing meals, and also other women's roles. After childhood, comes the adolescent phase, the period of time when Buang children were taught traditional teachings.

### **Learning Traditional Customs and Taboos**

Traditional customs and taboos were taught to the boys, when they were about 11 or 12 years of age, or when they started to cover tree bark wrappings over their nakedness. At this stage, the boys were no longer allowed to sleep in their parents' house at night. Although they were part of the family during the day, working and having meals with them, they were required by rule to sleep in the men's house or *haus man* (a special house, regarded as sacred, and reserved for males only). The boys must be present at the men's house before darkness sets.

From early evening till late, the boys were taught traditional customs and taboos in the men's house. The teachings were done orally by specially-appointed guardians, who were usually bachelors. Most of the teachings were general, and were also taught to the girls, but the special lessons, taught to the boys only, were lessons in the art of tribal fighting, and lessons on certain male taboos. Boys, who were reported for misbehaving, often received punishment from their guardians, in front of the other boys, as part of their lessons.

The girls did not learn in groups, such as the boys did. At an early age of about seven or eight years, or when a girl started to wear grass skirts, she began to learn customs and taboos. Buang girls were taught by their mothers and aunties, or by other older women. This went on from time to time, until the girls reached puberty.

After this phase of learning, the boys and girls were then ready for separation from their childhood age.

### **The Initiation**

The separation from childhood age into adulthood was marked by the initiation ceremony. First, there was a period, where one must endeavour to succeed in tests and trials before being initiated. The initiation ceremony was largely for males. While the females had no formal ceremonies, they usually observed some other means to gain their marks of womanhood.

From the men's house, the boys were then selected to undergo some tests. First, they were taken to tribal battlefields to witness the battles going on. Later, they took part in a trial battle play, being organised by their guardians. After that, they took part in a real battle with the older men, and, after this first taste of real battle, the boys were ready for the initiation ceremony.

The initiation ceremony was simple, and yet memorable, for the boys. On the day of the ceremony, they were dressed in full traditional costumes, and were displayed in front of the whole community. They were then given some encouragement speeches by the village elders, and, after that, each boy was given a special bow and arrow. This signified, and declared, that the boys had passed from childhood to manhood. After this, a great feast was held, where everybody was invited.

The girls had no special ceremony to mark their entry into womanhood, and adult age. From the day a girl started to have her first menstrual period, she was kept in the house, out of sight, for about three or four weeks, and then released.

The day of her release was marked by a feast, attended by her family and close relatives. After this, she was closely monitored and instructed further on how to behave and act as a woman. She should now abide by all the customs and taboos that she had learnt from her mother, aunties, and other women.

About two to three years after her first menstrual period, the girl's family and relatives would decide whether she was ready for declaration into womanhood. If all the family and relatives agreed that she was ready, then they would hang a *bilum* on her head as a sign that showed she had been declared into womanhood. She was now also ready for marriage, if any young men wished to marry her.

### **The Post-Initiation Period**

After the initiation period, the boys and girls obtained further instruction, especially advice concerning adult and married life. The instructions were taught to them through the same pattern of learning: boys in the men's house, and girls by their parents, aunties, and other women.

After further instruction, the boys and girls were then fully accepted as adults. This meant that they no longer submitted to their childhood guardians. They now had every right as adults to fully participate in community activities. One exception was that they still had to avoid mixing with the opposite sex without an elder's consent. Respect for the opposite sex was highly maintained. As the young ones were then fully accepted as adults, they were given responsible roles like: for the males, being a village watchman, or messenger; and for the females, they were given responsibilities for choosing which garden should be harvested first, or they were specially appointed to help another woman, who was in labour.

This was also the time when the young ones could decide to marry, but this applied especially to the males, since the females had been given this opportunity earlier, when they were first declared into womanhood.

### **Successful Adults**

When a young Buang person reached the stage of full adulthood, there were hardly any known failures. The successful adult was regarded as a man or woman, who fulfilled the traditional aspects of male or female life, in and for the community. They respected, and lived by, the traditional customs and taboos. They were now of great importance to their community, for the value and dignity of the

community was sustained for another generation by these young men and women. This was the ultimate aim of Buang youth life.

### **Buang Youth Life Today**

Traditional Buang youth life has changed today, since the coming of the white man. The modern education system has taken over from the traditional one, replacing the role of parents and guardians. This education system, I believe, has failed. It produces a sense of failure, more than one of success. Many young Buang people today, in the village, feel unimportant, because they have never been to school. Many feel failures, because they could not go on to high school. Only a few “pass”, and the rest become “dropouts”. This creates frustrations, and problems, among the young people, who must now try harder to find their place in the community.

Schooling takes up much time for many young people, and, so, initiation ceremonies are dying out. This, again, creates a serious problem. It has made the passing of childhood to adulthood much more difficult for the young person, and much vaguer for the community. Nothing has taken the place of the initiation process, especially in the discipline and training for freedom-loving children.

So young Buang people today are quite undisciplined in childhood, and, without initiation, become rebellious adults.

The new system of government, too, has taken away the powers of the village leaders and “big men”, and so young people don’t respect these leaders any more.

The youth group of the church failed in Buang, because, sometimes, young men and women will not be permitted to meet together, as observed in the traditional customs. Many youth groups in Buang have ceased to exist, because of suspicious and criticising parents and families of the young ones. There has been criticism of youth programs, such as, having night fellowships, going for outreach, and going out Bible camping. These attitudes of parents and families have, somehow, resulted in the young ones taking part in other outside activities, such as playing sport to win money, having drinking parties,

listening and dancing to pop music, and engaging in “boy/girl” relationships, which sometimes ends in corrupt marriages.

Somehow “Christianity” (which was new) was associated with the new Western lifestyle, and has mistakenly promoted some very unChristian practices! It is a pity that the introduction of Christianity was not more contextual – penetrating into Buang lifestyle, and “baptising” it, that is, adapting, or fulfilling, traditional life and practices with Christian meaning, and also accepting the good that is in Buang society.

The challenge for the church today is to set up Christian programmes, along with the traditional support of the community, which can meet the needs of young people today.

## **2. Biblical Teaching about Youth Life**

The life of young Christians must be built on a biblical foundation. The Bible places strong emphasis on young people, and especially on the need to train and discipline them to take their place in the Christian community. Here are some Bible passages that show different ways in which the Bible signifies youth life.

### **The Jewish Context (OT)**

Youth is a time with no fixed limit. “Youth” is used for infants, or the very young (Ex 2:6; Judges 13:8; 1 Sam 1:22; 4:21), and is used for the fully-grown as well (Gen 34:19; 2 Sam 18:5; Lev 27:1-8). But, age 20 is the time when one has passed from youth to maturity. Age 20 appears to be the upper age limit of the group, which needs special attention. For example, in Ex 30:14, those under the age of 20 are not required to give an offering as “ransom pay” for their lives; and, in Lev 27:3, when making a vow of dedication, the value of a person above the age of 20 is greater than that of a person below the age of 20; and, in Num 1:3, those conducting the census counted people of age 20 and upwards.

Parents are encouraged to discipline their children from an early age (Prov 13:34; 19:18). The book of Proverbs has many more verses, which show the importance of child training.

Children, who had faith in God, and who were disciplined, became leading figures; like, Joseph, who submitted to God, when he was sold as a slave by his brothers, and God made him a ruler in Egypt (Gen 38:46); and Samuel, as a child, was dedicated to God, and became a priest and a prophet of Israel (1 Sam 3:19-21). Similarly, David trusted God, and became king of Israel (1 Sam 17:33-37).

Children are always regarded as part of religious worship. For example, children were present when Joshua led worship at Mt Ebal (Josh 8:35), when King Jehoshaphat prayed in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Chr 20:13), and also when the people of Judah were offering sacrifices, and rejoicing, during the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 12:43).

Lastly, children are valued highly. They are regarded as blessings from God (Ps 127:3-5). Old men rejoice in their grandchildren, and even bless them (Gen 48:9; Prov 17:6).

### **The Christian Context (NT)**

The New Testament also shows that children are valued highly. Jesus accepted children, and blessed them (Matt 19:14-15), and He said that children should be welcomed (Mark 9:36-37). He also warns against causing children to sin (Mark 9:42). Both Paul and John wrote special words to children in their letters (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20; 1 John 2:12-14).

The New Testament shows prominent characters, who submitted to God in their childhood days, like John the Baptist, who grew, and became strong in the Spirit (Luke 1:80); Jesus, who grew, and was filled with wisdom and the grace of God (Luke 2:40); Timothy, who knew the scriptures from childhood (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).

The New Testament also places emphasis on training and disciplining children. It shows that training a child is largely the duty of parents (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21), and also the duty of church elders (Tit 2:1-6).

Lastly, the New Testament shows that children are part of the congregation. Jesus wanted the children to praise Him in the temple



(Matt 21:15-16). Paul's letters to the congregations in Ephesus and Colossae have some words especially for young people, and this shows that young people are part of the congregation.

To sum up the points of the Bible, we see that, firstly, the children are special, and are regarded as a blessing from God. They are valued highly. Children must be trained and disciplined in God's ways by their parents and elders, and by the whole community of God's people. They must grow in faith with God, to become God-fearing people, along with the whole community of God's people.

The Bible doesn't show clearly whether young people are a group of their own in the community of God's people. A statement from the South Australian Youth Ministry makes this clear:

Theologically, there is no distinction between youth and adults. The scriptures, nowhere, separate "youth" into a distinct sub-cultural group. They are neither better nor worse than any other Christian.<sup>1</sup>

What the Bible requires of youth is that every one of us must remember God in our youth, to be able to live a successful God-fearing life until we all reach unity in the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God.

### **3. Present Youth Ministries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea**

#### **The Youth Group**

The youth ministry of the congregation covers the children's Sunday school, as well as the confirmation class, and the youth group of the congregation. In ELC-PNG, the children's Sunday school and the confirmation class are not generally recognised as being under the youth ministry. So, when speaking of the youth ministry, it is often the "youth group" that comes to mind.

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<sup>1</sup> South Australian District, LCA Youth Ministry Committee, *Youth Ministry and the Congregation*, Adelaide SA: LLL, 1983, p. 1.

The present ELC-PNG youth office was set up in the early 1960s, under the former “Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea” (ELCONG). Missionary, Revd Jack F. Reents, of America, was appointed director, and, at that time, he published a booklet containing information on forming a youth group. The booklet, written in *Tok Pisin*, titled *Buk Bilong Lainim Wok Bilong Ol Yanpipol*, contains the basic patterns on which a youth group is built. The present youth groups in ELC-PNG are based on these patterns, which I will try to describe here.

The youth group is part of the congregation. It is made up of interested young people from the congregation, who are aged between 14 and 25 years. The youth must elect their own office-bearers, consisting of a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, along with their assistants. An elder must be appointed by the congregation to act as an adviser to the youth group.

The youth members are divided into smaller groups according to the “five-star” programme (the five-star program is described in the booklets by Reents, pp. 25-27, and Strauss, pp. 65-131). The “five-star” groups are set, according to the five programmes, which include worship, bible study, outreach, charity, and sport. A leader from each group is elected to form, along with other leaders, the five-star committee. Other activities, which are held during fellowship times, are prayer meetings, Bible sharing, and Bible quizzes. Outside activities include Bible camps, outreaches, and sports.

The youth president is the youth group’s representative in the congregation council, reporting on youth work to the council. The congregation council also informs the youth group about church matters concerning youth, through the youth president. In this way, the youth group is in touch with the congregation, and church as a whole. The youth group is also part of the ELC-PNG National Youth body, through the parish, circuit, and district youth bodies.

### **The Major Aims of Christian Youth Ministries**

The Bible stresses the need to train, and prepare, young people in faith and discipline, so that they may take their place in the Christian

community. This should be the standard aim of all Christian youth ministries.

The major aim of the Christian youth ministry in ELC-PNG is to help young people know Jesus as their Lord, and to integrate young people into the life and service of the congregation and the church. This aim is acknowledged by Reents,<sup>2</sup> and also by Strauss.<sup>3</sup> The aim is also emphasised by other Lutheran churches, like the Lutheran church of Australia,<sup>4</sup> and the American Lutheran church,<sup>5</sup> and also by other denominations, like the Nazarene church,<sup>6</sup> and the Seventh-day Adventist church.<sup>7</sup>

Since the aim of the ELC-PNG youth ministry has grounds in the Bible, its youth ministry must strive to meet this particular aim. If not, the youth ministry is a failure.

### **Problems with the Aims not being met within the ELC-PNG Youth Ministry**

Nearly all of the youth groups in ELC-PNG have failed to fulfil the aims of the youth ministry, especially to integrate the youth into the life and service of the congregation and church.

First and foremost, is the misunderstanding of the aims. Many youth members and leaders, church elders, and other leaders, have misunderstood, or have not been aware of, the youth ministry's aims. Then also, if the aims are clear, they are not being achieved by the youth group. The congregation, time and again, leaves the youth

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Reents, *Buk Bilong Lainim Wok Bilong ol Yangpipol*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, nd, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Strauss, *Wokabaut Wantaim ol Yangpela*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, 1990, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> South Australian District, LCA Youth Ministry Committee, *Youth Ministry*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Rich Bimler, *77 Ways of Involving Youth in the Church*, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1977, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Garry Glassco, and Tarp Goma, *Ol Program Bilong NYI*, Mt Hagen PNG: Nazarene Publications, 1993, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Church Ministries Department, *Adventist Youth Handbook for Papua New Guinea*, Lae PNG: SDA Ministries Department, 1985, pp. 6-7.

ministry to the youth group itself, with no proper guidance to help the young people achieve the given aims.

Here is an example of a youth group, which somehow failed to fulfil the aims of the youth ministry. Information here on the Resurrection Lutheran Youth Group, of 7th Street Lae, is based on my own experience, when I was president of the youth group from 1990 to 1991.

The Resurrection Youth Group was formed in 1980. There were about 65 members at that time, but, when I joined the group in 1989, there were ten members left from the “1980” youth group. The rest were new youth members. Only four from the “1980” group were fully involved in congregational activities, therefore fulfilling the aim of the youth ministry. Fourteen of the old members had transferred out of the area, while six joined other denominations.

The rest of the youth members were still around, but were not involved in any youth work. They were there as non-active members of the congregation. Some of the many reasons given, when they were asked, as to why they were not involved in congregational activities, were that they had done their part already in the youth group, and their youth age had passed. Many said they had hard feelings against the youth group, because leaders of the youth group had misused the youth funds, or they were not given any chance to use the youth musical instruments. Some girls said that boys often asked them for secret relationships, and this turned them away from the youth group forever.

Because of these, and many other hard feelings against the youth group, these ex-youth members were reluctant to be involved in congregational activities or ministries. The original ten members left from the 1980 group claimed that they were the true success of the youth ministries, for they were still active in youth work.

The example of the Resurrection Youth Group shows that, after nearly ten years of the youth group’s existence, only four members had really fulfilled the aim of the youth ministry.

The failure of aims, by them not being met, is largely due to lack of understanding of the youth ministry's aims by the church workers and leaders – pastors and laymen alike. Should these aims be recognised, and implemented fully, by these groups of church workers, the youth group will have greater success in fulfilling the aims of youth ministry.

Research was conducted in 1977 by the Melanesian Institute on behalf of ELC-PNG. Their report on youth work indicated that many church leaders and elders had two major questions about youth work. The two questions were:

1. What is the aim of youth ministry?
2. If the aims of youth ministry are of high value, how can the church help leaders and elders cope with, or encourage, youth work?<sup>8</sup>

Reports to the 16th Synod of ELC-PNG in Goroka,<sup>9</sup> from some church districts, on youth work, showed that youth groups have been misled about the youth ministry's aims, and many had been confused on where to start and end. Some reported that their youth ministry was successful in other ways, but they failed to mention that the youth ministry's aims had been fulfilled.

Misunderstanding of the aims leads to false aims arising within the group. For example, the youth group project becomes a misdirected aim for the youth group to reach. When the project is successful, the youth group then considers themselves to be a successful youth group. In the "five-star" programme, it lays down the objectives of the church's youth ministry. The programme is set to turn a young person into a mature and committed Christian. It indicates that:

- "worship" is to help a young person know how to worship God in many ways;

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<sup>8</sup> Theodoor Ahrens, *Sios i Laik Sut long Mak*, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1977, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *District Report Handbook: ELC-PNG Synod Goroka, 1988*, Lae PNG: ELC-PNG National Office, 1988.

- “Bible study” is to help a young person know more about the Bible, and to help the young person to study the Bible by himself or herself;
- “outreach” is to help the young person be ready to put his or her faith into action, by witnessing to Christ in all places and at all times;
- “charity” is to help the young person be involved in helping, giving, and supporting those in need; and
- “sport” or recreation is to help young people meet, play with, and get to know each other.

Now, many youth groups believe that, to fulfil these objectives, means that they have fulfilled the aims of the “five-star” programme. For example, three of the “five-star” programme activities (outreach, charity, and sports) have become aims of some youth groups. For some, to go for outreach all around Papua New Guinea is the only aim of their youth group. To help the poor and needy (charity) can be another aim of another youth group. And, to go around playing sport with other youth groups, or other clubs, can be another aim, which some youth groups adopt. So the real aims of youth ministry have not been met in these situations.

Apart from the group, other individual aims have also been encountered. Some have the aim of encouraging boy/girl relationships, which later end in marriage – and that’s it, thanks to the youth group, and goodbye. Then there is the young boy, who is so keen to learn to play musical instruments, and, after gaining some skills, he leaves the youth group, and goes out to try out his new skills in the local live band. These types of aims lead to many youth members failing to achieve the real aims of youth ministry.

Reports to the recent ELC-PNG National Youth Conference held in Mumeng (1995), by youth leaders from many church districts, showed that the aims have been misunderstood, and are not being met. I attended the conference myself, and I witnessed that youth representatives, who attended the Conference, presented reports, which

showed that they had been fulfilling misdirected aims, which were being set up within the youth groups by their members.

Their youth plans have become some kind of aims, which they must fulfil to be successful. Some plans, which were mentioned, were making outreach trips to other provinces, visiting overseas partner church youth groups, establishing a business project, sending youth leaders overseas for youth courses and conferences, recording gospel songs in a studio, and some more like these. These activities represent misdirected aims, some of which can turn a youth group into another organisation, which is quite separate from the congregation, or church framework.

Nothing in these reports mentioned anything about young men and women from the youth group being integrated into the greater congregational and church ministries, or taking responsible roles in the church. This is the real aim of Christian youth ministries.

I feel that there should be other alternatives, in which the true aims of Christian youth ministry could be met. In my opinion, I suggest that the youth ministry should be examined, and be:

1. adjusted to be more effective; or
2. an alternative youth structure, locally oriented, should be established besides the present one.

I hereby select the second of the two suggested points to present a possible course of action, in which the aims of the Christian youth ministry could be met.

#### **4. An Ideal Christian Youth Ministry in Buang Tradition**

Here is my model of an ideal Christian youth ministry, built on local (Buang) patterns. I believe it is more appropriate for church structures to be built on local patterns, rather than being a copy of the missionary's home-church structure. The great commission, and the history of Christendom, both point clearly to the necessity of proclaiming the "Good News", but, neither in scripture, nor in the

historical development of the church, does the gospel include details of a particular social structure, or church organisation.

As already made clear (see section 2), the Bible places a strong emphasis on young people, and especially on the need to prepare them to take their place in the Christian community. In this model pattern that I am proposing, youth ministry is defined in its wider sense, which includes the whole of a youth's life – starting from infant baptism to the mature age of 20 or 25, and covers the Sunday school and confirmation class as well. This misconception of youth ministry being attached only to the youth group is altogether altered here. The model here is set according to the traditional life patterns of Buang youth.

### **Childhood Guidance and Training Period**

Childhood guidance and training have been a part of the Lutheran church's pastoral and educational ministries. These start at infant baptism, and proceed to Sunday school, and the confirmation class. So, as in the Buang tradition, the childhood age, from four to 13 years, is covered in these ministries. This should also be seen and recognised as a greater part of the overall church's youth ministry, which must continue on after the confirmation period, to help young Christians identify more deeply with the Christian community. So, in this sense, the confirmation rite must be held in a way to encourage young Christians to be willing to participate in the next step of what the youth ministry has to offer.

### **The Confirmation Rite in Light of the Initiation Ceremony**

The initiation ceremony in Buang marks the day a young person is declared into adulthood. In comparison, the concepts of confirmation, most generally held by Christians of the Lutheran church, are that it is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church, which helps the baptised child, through word and sacrament, to identify more deeply with the Christian community. The confirmation rite is also a religious rite, for the fulfilment of the confirmation process, where the young ones affirm their stand in the Christian community.

As many initiation ceremonies are dying out today in Papua New Guinea, the confirmation, and its celebrations, should have great



importance placed on them. Churches should not discourage, but encourage, the way confirmation ceremonies are being celebrated today, like having feasts and traditional dances of Christian value, and inviting fellow Christians of other congregations to witness. Since the initiation ceremony is dying out, and nothing is being done to replace it, I feel that the confirmation ceremony should be seen as fulfilling the role of initiation in a Christian context.

So, for example, as in the Buang tradition, something extra could be added to the confirmation ceremony, like having those to be confirmed dressed up in their own traditional or cultural dress. Further, when receiving the confirmation certificate, they could also be handed a small bow and arrow, or a *bilum*, each. The meaning for this could be defined in a Christian context. For example, the bow and arrow will signify that the young Christian is now armed and ready for the spiritual battle, which all other Christians are fighting. The bow and arrow can represent the word of God as the weapon of truth. Similarly, the *bilum* would signify that the young Christian girl is now ready to carry all the burdens, which she comes across in her Christian life.

Such celebrations could have a lasting impact on the participants and their families, and those present at the ceremony, and they may support and encourage the young Christians in their Christian lives. And also, if some “after confirmation” programmes are set for the young ones, then they will be willing to participate.

### **Post-Confirmation Period**

After the confirmation, there is no fixed programme for the young person, in which he or she can participate. The young person may know only to participate in the Sunday worship, or the communion service, but many drop out after the confirmation period. The youth group is the only place where the young person may go, but, then, the youth group has failed the very aim, which the confirmation demands.

In order that young people may assume more mature roles in the congregation, genuine opportunities should be provided for them to see themselves as members of the congregation, and to feel committed to its purposes. Major attention should be given to help young people to

accept the fulfilment of the confirmation ministry as a significant point for proceeding into the next stage of their lifelong Christian commitment. I feel that, apart from the youth group, the youth ministry should introduce an “after-confirmation” programme to help young ones, who have already been confirmed. So, as in the Buang concept, further guidance, acceptance, and a responsibility period must be applied here.

Here, I suggest that, after confirmation, the young person should be given further guidance, and then be given responsible duties within the congregation. So, instead of forming a new programme, and a new group, for the young people after confirmation, the young people should be incorporated into the already-established “men’s” and “women’s” groups.

As in Buang (and also in many other rural areas), it is unusual for young men and women to meet together by themselves. This caused problems with the youth groups, as mentioned in section 1. So here, boys can be adapted into the “men’s” fellowship group, while girls may be adapted into the “women’s” fellowship group. In this way, further guidance on the Christian life could be achieved, by the men training, and encouraging, the boys, and the same with the women and girls. This will be in line with the apostle’s words to Titus (2:3-6).

In these groups, the five-star programme of the youth ministry can be followed. This will be easy, because part of the programme is already being followed in both of these groups. Both men’s and women’s groups have programmes, which include worship times, Bible study, outreach, and charity, or community service. Sports (recreation) and Bible camps can be added for the interests of the young ones. In these groups, programmes and activities must be set also to suit the needs of the young ones involved. For example, important issues, which have always been learned in cultural traditions (as in the Buang tradition), like the menstrual period for females, other bodily changes, which occur in the lifetime of both sexes, sexual behaviour, and married life, are often neglected in family circles today. Teachings on these issues can be revived in these groups, so that boys and girls may learn them openly, without guilt or shame, and in a Christian context.

Programmes in these groups must also have special times for the young ones to promote their Christian skills, or leadership abilities.

The groups must be designed to provide a training ground for young Christians, with mature Christians leading them in group activities. The older and more-mature Christians here will feel more responsible for guiding the young Christians into full Christian ministries.

After some time in the groups, the young Christians must now be given full congregational responsibilities, depending on their character, capabilities, and willingness. The congregational ministries include the Sunday school, music group, church leadership, or administration, and other congregational activities. This is where young Christians, of both sexes, will participate together with the whole congregation. Here also, the call to Christian service could be wider, if the young ones can be persuaded to apply for training in the church's institutions, like the seminary, evangelist schools, church college, or teacher- and girl-training schools.

So here, now, the young people are being fully integrated into the full congregational and church's ministries, fulfilling the aims of the Christian youth ministry. In this ideal youth ministry model, I believe that many problems, which are currently faced within the ELC-PNG youth ministries today, will no longer bother young Christians, especially of the Buang church. Moreover, it will enable fulfilment of the aims of the youth ministry.

## **Conclusion**

Buang traditional youth life, as in many other Melanesian cultures, is an important part of the community. The community pays great attention to this, in raising and protecting its youth, from early childhood to mature age, so that the young people can be integrated into full community life.

In regard to this, the life of young people, in biblical terms, is also valued highly. From childhood, the young ones are trained and disciplined in God's ways, by parents and elders, or the whole

community of God's people, until they reach maturity, when they are placed into the full life of the community. The Bible doesn't show the life of young people as being of its own, and separated from the whole community of God's people. That is why the lives of Christian young people today must not be defined to mean that it belongs only to the "youth group" section of the church, nor that it belongs to some lower stages of the Christian life, and not equal with the rest of the community. This type of mentality, today, leads to the many problems facing the present ELC-PNG youth ministry.

So, I have come up with this alternative Christian youth structure, based on local (Buang traditional) patterns, and based on the Bible. This, I believe, could overcome many problems facing the youth ministry, and could fulfil the aims of Christian youth life. This ideal Christian youth structure would certainly benefit the Christian life of the Buang young people, if not the ELC-PNG youth ministry as a whole.

As an ex-youth leader, and member, who has witnessed the many failures of Christian youth ministry in ELC-PNG, I would encourage a serious review of the ministry, in order that it may become sensitive to traditional customs and structures. By doing so, I believe Christian youth ministry can be more efficient in achieving its aims.

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