

As a young Dominican priest, then-Father Chris Cardone was selected to serve a mission in the Solomon Islands, based, in part, on his Long Island origins. Interviewed by *The Long Island Catholic*, Archbishop Cardone offered some insight to his world.

“The Australian Dominicans wanted someone who could drive a boat” to the different islands, explained Archbishop Chris. “I was from Long Island. They also needed someone who could read a compass. I was an Eagle Scout.”

Father Cardone, ordained two years earlier, set out on a three-year missionary assignment in 1988 to serve in the Solomon Islands, a former British protectorate in the South Pacific. Almost thirty years later he is still there, now Archbishop of Honaira, one of three dioceses in the remote island nation east of Papua New Guinea. “I have always left my life open to what God wants,” Archbishop Cardone said, and has been happy doing so. “We are a young and growing Church. “We’re opening parishes and building schools.” Still, the people struggle with a lack of basic resources, such as clean water and electricity. At one time only in the cathedral had electricity. Archbishop Chris noted that one American dollar is equivalent to about seven Solomon Islands’ dollars. Along the same lines, while a gallon of gasoline in the United States is about four dollars, a gallon of gasoline in the Solomon Islands costs about twelve to fifteen dollars.



Dioceses in the Solomon Islands are experiencing growth, building churches and schools. One of the main points of focus is education. The children of the islands are eager to learn but often are not afforded the opportunity. The Catholic church provides teachers in public schools increasing the ability to reach more students. Archbishop Chris explained there is one Catholic secondary school on the islands and a second is under construction.



Archbishop Cardone’s home parish is St. Raymond, East Rockaway. He grew up with one brother, Marianist Father Tom Cardone, and two sisters. “It was a great parish. The Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters encouraged vocations.” After Chaminade High School he attended Providence College, operated by the Dominicans. “I began as a business major but found my vocation. There were so many priests both teaching and serving as campus ministers. It was a very Catholic experience.” Ordained in 1986, he was first assigned to St. Gertrude’s in Cincinnati. “It was a great parish, a wonderful place to begin my priesthood. I also taught at the Dominican novitiate.”

Two years later, he learned that Dominicans were looking for a priest to serve in the Solomons. “You have to take four planes and two boats to get there,” he explained. The islands have a high poverty rate; most of the men work as subsistence fishermen or subsistence farmers. “There are 1,200 islands but the people live on 400 of them. There are about 70 different languages, with seven main languages, in my diocese,” Archbishop Cardone said. In addition the people generally speak pijin English, he said. “I can say Mass in three of the native languages and preach in pijin.”

For his first assignment, he served in the city of Gizo. He taught at the Dominican novitiate but also worked as administrative assistant to the bishop and served as administrator of the cathedral church there.

After six years, he became founding pastor of a parish on the island of Noro. “I went with one bag, a Mass kit, a guitar, and a volleyball net. “There was a small church already and the people built a thatched-roof house for the pastor.” He offered Mass and taught the people of Noro as well as visiting other nearby communities and neighboring islands.



Though he enjoyed boating on Long Island, traveling by boat from island to island can take hours and is not always a pleasurable ride. “Once a family from Cincinnati came down to help. On the ride to one of the islands, we hit rough seas, and one of them, a pre-med student, spent seven hours retching over the side.”

In 2000, he was named pastor at Nila, another group of islands. The next year he was named auxiliary bishop of Gizo but continued to serve at Nila for nine months. Then, he returned to Gizo to the diocesan headquarters.

In 2004 he was named bishop of the Diocese of Auki. “Auki is four times larger and 10 times poorer,” Archbishop Cardone said. Still, there is much cause for celebration in the Solomons. Natives live with less, often eking out a subsistence lifestyle, Bishop Cardone commented, “but they seem happier. We have island communities and culture,” Bishop Cardone said. Despite the poverty, “there is nobody that is hungry and nobody that is homeless.”

In addition, the Church there has succeeded in developing native clergy and religious. “When I went to the islands in 1988 there were six native Dominican friars, priests and brothers, and 12 sisters,” Archbishop Chris said. Now in Honiara there are 48 diocesan and religious priests with 100 religious in the 11 religious congregations present serving in 13 parishes and other apostolates. The Archdiocese also hosts the provincial seminary, Holy Name of Mary Seminary, Tenaru, which was founded in 1995.

“We are trying to go from being a missionary Church to a local Church,” depending less on outside assistance. At the parish level, “we’re trying to get the people to own and look after the Church,” he said. The Church still must pay the pastors. “The parishioners would pay their priests in fruit, fish, or pigs.” The Church is also trying to develop clean water supplies. “The women and children spend a lot of time finding water, carrying water, and washing clothes. The Church is also encouraging the men to take on more of that.”



Cardone was appointed as the Archbishop of Honiara by Pope Francis on June 22, 2016. He was installed as the third Archbishop of Archdiocese of Honiara on September 10, 2016. In his first homily as Archbishop, he says “The growth and development of the Church depends on us responding hopefully to the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

Archbishop Cardone continues his work to collaborate the diocesan and religious priests in the mission of pastoral care and evangelization. He empowers the lay faithful to participate in all aspects of the Church and prioritizes efforts in formal and non-formal education, healthcare, ministry to youth, Sunday school and men’s and women’s groups. He encourages modern means of communication and began the ministry of child protection.

To stay up-to-date with Archbishop Christopher Cardone, OP follow the Archdiocese of Honiara on Facebook.