

## HELP US TO PROVIDE A SCHOOL TO THE ASMAT CHILDREN: the place to build a just future

### A UNIQUE TERRITORY, THE LAND OF 1000 RIVERS

The Diocese of Agats covers an area of 28,000 square kilometres.

Most of the area is wet and muddy land with an altitude of only 1 to 2 metres above sea level, covered by mangroves, tidal flats, freshwater swamps, and rainforests in the lowlands.

Streams and rivers dominate the landscape of Agats, which is why it is called the 'land of thousand rivers', they are essential as transport routes to connect the people of the 200 isolated and remote villages. The local Asmat people use traditional boats to transport goods and people.



The houses of the Asmat are simple stilts



The Asmat, skilled woodcarvers, are Catholic



The Franciscan Bishop Aloysius Murwito among the Asmat youth



The 200 Asmat villages are only connected by water

### THE UNIQUE ASMAT TRIBE

The Asmat are a **nomadic population of gatherers and hunters**.

They have to move from their village to search for food in the surrounding forest. The basis of their diet is sago starch extracted from sago palms. This requires felling a palm, extracting the pith and processing it into a flour that is used to prepare meals. It is normal to find the villages empty when there are these expeditions, where even children are involved. The Asmat are world famous for their skills as **carvers and wood artists**, an art that has been handed down from father to son for thousands of years.



Read the request  
of Bishop Aloysius Murwito,  
Franciscan friar,  
Bishop of the Diocese of Agats

Agats, June 2023

Dearest Brother Massimo,

I am writing to you because I have a request that is particularly close to my heart. Here in the **diocese of Agats, lives a unique Christian population that risks being overwhelmed by the encounter with the outside world that is becoming more and more intrusive. It is a population with an extraordinary knowledge of nature and a very rich spirituality.** They are predominantly Christians. Just think that I had the great joy of ordaining the first native priest in 2019. **But the reason I am writing to you is that the Asmat young people need to be accompanied, trained, and educated to be able to face the challenges of encountering the world that is changing around them.**



No longer isolated and masters of the forests today, they need to know how to interact with state organisations and foreign people, because their region has become a regency of Indonesia with the inevitable consequences of coming into contact with people from other parts of the state, with other cultures and other ways of life and, above all, other interests, including economic ones. **The Asmat parents are unprepared, frightened and overwhelmed. That is why they request for schools for their young people.**

I took on this commitment and started the project of a school for Asmat youth. We started the work in 2020 and already 95 young people are attending, **but we want to meet all the requirements and to be able to do this we have to build 2 more classrooms and a dormitory for the girls.** Here it is not possible to think of a school without a boarding school because the Asmat live scattered in 200 villages, far away and only reachable by water.



Only with the help of benefactors who are close to us Franciscans all over the world, can we hope to be able to continue this work. **I therefore ask you to make the benefactors aware of the**

**educational needs of the Asmat. Only through the school can we help them face the difficult challenge of meeting other peoples, other cultures and succeed in defending their art, their wisdom and their faith.**

In communion,

*Aloysius Murwito, OFM*  
Bishop Aloysius Murwito, OFM



## THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

Since the Agats region became a regency of Indonesia, civil servants, merchants, businessmen, from the many areas of the country have arrived. The Asmat, used to living isolated and on the edge of the world, are in a great difficulty because they cannot interact with the state administration and people with different cultures. **The young people especially, when confronted with the new world, feel overwhelmed, unprepared, and cannot be helped by their parents, who experience the same difficulty.** This is why they want to go to school, to understand and prepare themselves for the world that has changed around them. **The Franciscan friars have devised an educational proposal to support them in this extraordinary challenge, enabling them to have the intellectual and cultural instruments to face the new reality.**

### PROJECT

#### PHASE 1: EXPANSION OF THE SCHOOL AND CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW DORMITORY

Bishop Murwito has this people in his heart and wants to help them through this delicate phase. Since 2020, he has been building a school, which today already has four classrooms, teachers' rooms and the presidency, a multifunctional space, and a dormitory for the children. There are 95 students currently attending. **But in order to accommodate more boys and girls, there is an urgent need to build 2 more classrooms and the girls' dormitory: only in this way will 60 more Asmat students be able to attend the school next school year.**

#### PHASE 1 EXPENSES

Construction of 2 new classrooms	€ 31,000
Construction of the girls' dormitory	€ 62,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€ 93,500</b>



For Asmat boys and girls, school is essential

APPROVED PROJECT  
FOUNDATION OF M FRATERNITAS



Bishop Murwito among his Asmat people



To accommodate 60 more Asmat young people today we must expand the school

#### PHASE 2: GUARANTEEING THE FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL

Asmat families are very poor and cannot pay the costs of school fees. Therefore, every year, in order to ensure the school runs at full capacity, the Franciscan friars will have to pay for board and lodging for the students and the salaries of teachers and educators. **The annual requirement is estimated at €127,110.**

#### PHASE 2 EXPENSES

Annual tuition fees for students	€ 12,300 per year
Board and lodging for 150 students	€ 64,710 per year
Annual salaries for basic subject teachers	€ 22,200 per year
Salaries for teachers and college educators	€ 27,900 per year
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€ 127,110</b>

To ensure that 60 new students can go to school!

**HELP THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS TO SEND THE ASMAT YOUTH TO SCHOOL**

## THE CHRISTIAN AND FRANCISCAN PRESENCE AMONG THE ASMAT OF PAPUA

Before 1950, the Asmat never had any contact with the world.

**Their very first contact with another culture came with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Father Setegward.** One of the most effective ways to start communicating and creating friendships with the Asmat was to offer them mirrors, axes and tools. Then came the missionaries of the Order of the Holy Cross from Minnesota (USA) who built several churches, chapels and schools.

In 1969, the territory of **Asmat became a district** for the Indonesian government. In the same year, Asmat became a diocese with Bishop Alphonsus Sowada OSC, the first bishop, a graduate in anthropology.



In 2002, the Indonesian government elevated the district to a regency with Agats as the capital. Since then, **migration from other parts of Indonesia** of government personnel and traders with different cultural backgrounds has begun, transforming **Agats from a traditional village into a multicultural society** with which the population is unable to interact.

Since 2002, **Franciscan Bishop Aloysius Murwito has been Bishop of Agats.** He had the joy in 2019 of ordaining the first Asmat tribal and three deacons as priests: a gift for the Indonesian church and for Papua, a region with a Christian majority.



**Aware of the difficulties the Asmat are experiencing, he is the promoter of the school for Asmat youth.**

## Here is how you can support the charity projects of the Franciscan friars in Papua, Indonesia

### **BANK TRANSFER**

**Bank:** Intesa Sanpaolo  
**Branch:** 09606, Piazza della Libertà, 13 00192 Roma - Italia  
**Account Name:** FONDAZIONE OFM FRATERNITAS ONLUS  
**Account Holder Address:** c/o Casa Generalizia OFM, Via di Santa Maria Mediatrice 25, 00165 Roma - Italia  
**EUR ACCOUNT IBAN:** IT15T0306909606100000168958  
**USD ACCOUNT IBAN:** IT22V0306909606161009304690  
**SWIFT:** BCITITMM  
**REASON:** PAPUA SCHOOL ASMAT

### **ONLINE**

at [www.ofmfraternitas.org](http://www.ofmfraternitas.org)



If you would like to support our Franciscan activities and projects or have further information to get to know us better, you can call us on **06 92917107** or cell phone **+393207135875**.



### FONDAZIONE OFM FRATERNITAS ONLUS

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