



Carmelite Friars of Australia and Timor-Leste

MISSION COORDINATOR UPDATE 04.04.07

As Easter will very soon be with us, we pray that we may reach out to others with the gift of human love that God has given to each of us.

I arrived back from a month in Timor-Leste in early March. Fr Wayne, Fr Bruce and Nancy, (Fundraising development Manager), also visited Timor-Leste during the month of February. I was very happy with my visit, because the Carmelite projects are going very well. Many of the Timorese people though are very disillusioned with the poverty that they are still experiencing and very frightened by gangs of unemployed youth who are causing havoc in Dili. Some of these gangs are large and very well organised. This current situation is very complex. There are layers upon layers within the various Timor-Leste communities which cannot just be dismissed as rival gangs fighting each other.

Zumalai

Life in Zumalai was operating as normal as people carried out their daily activities of collecting water, cleaning their homes, washing clothes at the spring, going to the market and students attending schools. There was a shortage of rice, which meant that the people had to rely on corn and sago for their staple diet. Because there was a shortage of rice, the little rice that was available was too expensive for people in the Zumalai sub-district to buy.

February and March are both months when the wet season occurs. While I was in the Zumalai sub-district I visited a number of villages situated on fertile, lowlands. One of these villages was Belako. When there is good rain which occurred late February the rice paddies have access to water that is channelled from the nearby Mola River. Belako is an area which is a mass of rice paddies, many of which have been ploughed, sown with new plants and will be ready to be harvested in two to three months.

Another wonderful experience was seeing the new Carmelite hand tractor being used to plough the rice paddies at Belako. The hand tractor was bought by

Provincial Office
75 Wright Street
Middle Park 3026
Australia

Phone: 03 9699 1922
Fax: 03 9699 1944
Email: rpatterson@carmelnet.org
www.carmelites.org.au/ceasttimor.mission.htm



New Hand Tractor Ploughing a Rice Paddy at Belako Village, Zumalai Sub-District

JETS (Joseph's East Timor Support) group who are from Foster in South Gippsland, Victoria. They were keen to support an agricultural project.

In the lowlands of the Zumalai sub-district the rice paddies are fertilized with hand tractors or buffalos. The ploughs are able to fertilise the land much quicker, by killing the wild grass and weeds growing in the fields which rots and becomes fertilizer for the soil. Buffalos trample the paddies to soften up the ground and make it easier to plant the rice. The buffalo dung is also good fertilizer but more hand tractors are being used than in the past. The Carmelites have two hand tractors and a large tractor that they hire out to the farmers in the area. During my visit this year, it was very obvious that maintenance of machinery is on-going and costly. Spare parts are able to be purchased more cheaply from West Timor.

One of the positive things in the Zumalai sub-district is that more and more of the land is now being cultivated as the Timorese learn the skills of growing rice

and become more motivated and confident farmers. Before 1999 the rice paddies had been cultivated by Balinese who had been transmigrated to the low lying areas of the Zumalai sub-district. They were very industrious workers and farmed the land well. The Timorese were mainly helping hands during this time and when the Balinese left Timor-Leste after the independence vote much land was left uncultivated.

Future Education Opportunities

During my last visit to Timor-Leste, it was great to discover that the scholarship program had expanded. The program began last September 2006. It's goal was to provide financial assistance for:

- (1) **teachers** at Zumalai and Raimea Village Catholic Primary Schools who both have a shortage of teachers
- (2) students from Zumalai sub-district to attend **Senior Secondary School**
- (3) students from Zumalai sub-district to attend the local **Junior Secondary School**.

Two of the senior secondary students are attending Don Bosco Technical School, Fatumaka on the Eastern side of Timor-Leste. They are doing a three year woodwork and electrical course which will equip them to return to the Zumalai compound and assist with the running of the workshop. This school is known to be one of the best in Timor-Leste but a long way from Zumalai. Both students have settled well at the school and I was surprised to see how confident they are now.

Two other students are attending **St Paul 1V Catholic Secondary School in Dili**. These boys live with the Carmelite friars at Fatuhada, Dili where they are provided with accommodation and a place to study. One evening during my last visit, I watched them working together on complex mathematical problems.

Five students from Zumalai sub-district are attending **Zumalai Junior Secondary School**. They live on the Carmelite compound in a traditional house with wooden walls and a thatched roof. They share their meals with all those who live on the Carmelite compound. Brother Antonio has set up a study area for them which they use from 6 – 8pm each evening. A generator provides electricity for the students. These students are very lucky as Zumalai does not have an electricity power plant.

A further sign of progress in the town of Zumalai is that a **Senior Secondary School** has now been



Scholarship Students ready to attend Zumalai Junior Secondary School

opened. The Senior Secondary School operates during the afternoon in a government primary school building. Kiama City Council in New South Wales has become a friendship city to Zumalai and they are providing financial support for ten students to attend this Senior Secondary School.

There are also fifteen Timorese Carmelite students currently living and studying on the island of Flores in Indonesia. These students are studying Philosophy, the Bible, Liturgy, English and Indonesian languages and Culture and Society in the Indonesian context. They will spend at least five years studying in Indonesia to complete their Carmelite training. During this time there will also be a strong focus on leadership and communication skills to prepare them for their future work in Timor-Leste. These students are being supported at present by Corpus Christi, Cranebrook.

Easter Blessings,

Rosemary Patterson

Timor-Leste Mission Coordinator