



Carmelite Friars of Australia and Timor-Leste

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Father Wayne returned from Timor-Leste on the 12th July, 2006. He was shocked by the devastation of Dili but inspired by the way the Carmelites were dealing with the situation.

When he flew into Dili, there was and still is, a sea of tents surrounding the airport, people too frightened to return to their homes or have no home to return to. The people fear the night times the most and have lost trust in their neighbours.

There are many, many displacement centres in church grounds, the airport and at schools with large brick walls topped with barbed wire and broken glass. The Carmelite men had 300 refugees staying with them at the novitiate compound at the height of this present crisis. People were sleeping in the chapel and lecture rooms and the Carmelite students gave their bedrooms to mothers with small children.



Part of the Motael Displacement Shelter is also inside the Carmelite Clinic

The Carmelite Sisters at Motael are working in a huge displacement centre beside the Motael Church. Father Wayne took medical supplies and money to buy food for the displacement shelters at Motael and the Carmelite Novitiate at Fatuhada.

There are over 500 houses in Dili completely burnt and as many houses have been looted. Driving around the streets of Dili the houses and many small businesses that have been burnt are very noticeable. Most of this occurred because these people were living in the wrong 'suburb'. It is very difficult to understand the 'East' versus the 'West' as it didn't appear to be an issue in the past. There is a quietness around Dili as the government and people try to come to terms with what happened.

Amidst the violence that occurred, over 50,000 people fled back to their districts. Because of the deep fear within them they will not return until the situation in Dili stabilizes. Currently the districts are relatively settled however the influx of people from Dili has added an extra pressure because of a shortage of food.



Sr Fatinha, H.Carm. & Fr Aniceto, O.Carm at the Motael Displacement Shelter in Dili where there are 2,000 people



Fr Ipong, O.carm delivering food, during the present crisis, to families hiding in the mountains

Fr Ipong delivered food to fifty-four families hiding in the mountains behind where the new Formation / Training House is being built at Hera. When he arrived, the people had been hiding until they knew that it was a Carmelite car that was approaching. A man from Hera had walked all the way to Fatuhada in Dili to inform the Carmelite friars about these families who were hiding in the mountains at night. These families were starving because of food shortages. They would return to their homes during the day but had eaten all the food from their crops and were frightened of spending too much time in open areas to plant more seed. There had been no food transports to the local markets in the area for weeks and the people were also too frightened to walk any distance from the security of each other. These people have a very good relationship with the Carmelites as can be seen by the smiles on their faces at receiving the food.

The intra-Timorese violence which erupted over the last couple of months has weakened and destroyed many of the relationships and trust between Timorese. The Carmelites are therefore seeing a major importance of continuing to build these relationships and break down the divisions that have occurred.

The forces behind the violence that took place continue to remain complex. Another difficulty in Timor-Leste is that so much information takes place through rumours. These rumours change and manipulate the information flow.

The Formation/ Training House being built at Hera has not been damaged. The students are protecting the building from being destroyed. They are also protecting the neighbouring families from gangs of youth with machetes and rocks. This present crisis has been a huge challenge to the young Carmelite men who have had to struggle to come to terms with both outer and inner nourishment. They are asking, “Am I able to live on an equal basis with all Timorese people?” As westerners we need to also ask the question: “Am I able to live on an equal basis with all people?”

The Timorese Carmelite men and women and all the people of Timor-Leste need to develop their capacity, dignity, self-confidence and independence. They need to be able to live with each other in unity. This is a huge task for the future and will take generations to be achieved.



“Rai nee Padre Carmel nian” - This is the land of the Carmelite Friars.

The words under the picture are on the storage shed of the Formation/ Training House being built at Hera. Where will the Timor-Leste Carmelite journey travel in the next ten years?

Rosemary Patterson

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