

FRANCISCANS IN PARTNERSHIP – ECO PASTORAL PROJECT EAST TIMOR

Promoting Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

BACK GROUND INFORMATION

East Timor became an independent nation in 1999 following decades of war that left the country ravaged economically, environmentally and spiritually. It is the poorest country in Asia and perhaps the most ill equipped to deal with the devastation inflicted upon it, especially the ruin exacted by the departing Indonesian military and militia forces. Yet there is hope in East Timor.

The Franciscan Friars in East and West Timor are part of the Province of Indonesia. In March 2004, Fr. Stephen Bliss, Val Mooney and Julie Morgan accepted an invitation from the Indonesian Provincial to visit the friars in East Timor. They were moved and inspired by what they saw. Since then others have joined the team, working out ways that can express our solidarity and commitment to the people of East Timor while deepening our own sense of what it means to be Franciscan. Our Parishes of St Francis and St Clare together with the Townsville Parish have formed a partnership with the Parish of Alas in East Timor.

Partnership One: 2005-2008- Our First Initiative

Local farmers trained in organic and sustainable farming techniques and care for the earth.

This project in Dotik will provide:

- > Resources
- > Training
- > Employment
- > Nutrition

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?

- To form a partnership for the next 4 years with the parish of Alas.
- To learn from the people of Alas.
- To establish a subsistence farming project in the Dotik area.
- To provide funds for the training of local farmers who will in turn train others.
- To fund accommodation during training and provide farming equipment.
- To raise \$3,000 from each parish per year for the project

St Francis Xavier's School has a project with the school in Weberek (Dotik) for the support of teachers and for a project yet to be decided. In 2006, The Parents and Friends Association raised \$2,500.00 from the school fete to contribute to this project.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

A committee of interested persons from both parishes has been meeting regularly trying to find ways of implementing the above objectives. One of the main challenges has been raising an awareness of this venture to our parishioners.

Throughout the last couple of years we have attempted to keep parishioners informed of our fund raising activities and as well as the money raised. A thermometer has been placed in the foyer of both churches; this thermometer records our progress in reaching our financial objective for the year.

We began our fundraising for the year with a highly successful and entertaining Trivia night. We are very grateful to all those involved in the organisation of the night, as well as those who provided the prizes. Our next event was the concert where we were entertained by, The Melbourne Chorus of The Sweet Adelines, the Harmony Capers' Quartet, Lucy Pfeiffer and her friends Diane Loi and Abby Hunt, from the Melbourne Conservatorium, and the talented young violinist Matthew Chan. As always we received strong support from our local parishioners. As we had met our yearly target we decided not to produce our Christmas gift cards this year, but they will return in 2008.

We have recently received a report on the progress of the Eco Pastoral Project, accompanied by great photos. They locals have planted 6 different crops which appear to be flourishing, dug 5 wells to water the crops during the dry season, fenced off the area correctly and planted several trees. Many of the local people were employed in the development of the land etc, which is important considering the very high rates of unemployment in East Timor. The Friars have also set out plans for the future. The money that the school and the Parents and Friends Association have raised over the last couple of years has been used to provide desks and chairs for the primary school in Weberek. This report was also accompanied by photos. It was important to receive these reports and to be able to pass on the information to the people who have so generously supported the projects over the last couple of years. We are now ready to begin our next series of fund raising event and once again look forward to entertaining you. If anyone is interested in joining our group, or has any exciting ideas, please contact us via the Parish Office.