

# Ba Ami Nia Belun Sira

Newsletter for Friends and Benefactors

## Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies

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### STAND ON THE HEIGHTS....

### TURN YOUR EYES TO THE EAST..... *Baruch 5:5*

The East Timorese people have literally lived out these words of the Prophet Baruch for generations. During centuries of Portuguese colonial rule and decades of Indonesian occupation, they longed for freedom to express their own identity and to build their own nation.

From the heights of Mt Ramelau and across the land, they have turned their eyes to the east each day and watched the rising of the sun with hope and courage.

After 24 years of heroic struggle, the dawn of independence has come amid much rejoicing. The present, however, is not devoid of shadow and many challenges present themselves. One of these is education.

I am pleased to report that our work goes on apace and it is sometimes difficult to keep up with the demand. During recent months, Sr Tess Ward in East Timor has been called on to give workshops to teachers in UNICEF learning centres, to address teachers in various parts of the country, to assist in Curriculum Development at the Ministry of Education as well as conducting workshops for teachers in Catholic schools in the Dili Diocese and to distribute books and educational resources to many schools.



In all these works, she is ably assisted by our invaluable Timorese workers, Maria, Milca and Meno.

On the Sydney scene, we are pleased to announce the publication of the third Tetun reader for Grade 4 and a series of ten books for Kindergartens as well as charts, reading recognition cards and other educational resources. We have a wonderfully committed team who work efficiently, productively and joyfully.

While I have focused on the educational needs in this short report we are also conscious of many other desperate needs experienced by the Timorese at this time. Many people are hungry because of shortage of food; many people are sick because effective health care is not available; many people remain desperately poor, because money is scarce and jobs are few. In the

compassionate heart of Jesus Christ, we do all we can to respond to these needs, providing food, clothing, shelter and medical assistance when possible, remembering the words of Blessed Mary MacKillop "Never see an evil without trying to remedy it".

Our prayer this Christmas is that we may all keep our eyes fixed firmly on the light and, with the Timorese, look to the future with hope.

Viva Timor Lorosa'e!

*Sister Josephine Mitchell*  
Director

*May the blessings  
of Christmas  
bring you heart and hope.*

*Peace on earth.*

*In this issue:*

Letter from President Xanana Gusmão

## Christmas in East Timor

A few months before Christmas, children try to look for animals or something else as a Christmas gift for their Godparents to receive their blessing.

One or two days before Christmas, people look for coconut sprouts, green bamboo, palm and banana leaves, boro tahan and corn skin to make rice baskets, saboko, tukir, hilun and lanpar. On Christmas Eve, people get together eggs, flour and sugar. The mothers start to prepare various Timorese traditional biscuits, e.g. koiranbu, dosi akar, dosi aifarina, dosi mantén, dosi kudatali, dosi nuu, koi xina, forai sona, lakeru musan sona, batar ain naruk sona. They make chips from cassava, and have taro, green bananas, bread fruit and jack fruit.

Parishioners clean, decorate and make the crib in the church. People make arches from leaves and flowers. They have dances such as tebedai, bidu and tebe from night until the next day.

Each household ties up animals such as goats, pigs, fowls and buffaloes to be killed and eaten with families, friends and relatives on this special celebration. Some families made a crib for the Holy Family. In the mountains, the schools organise theatres and parties.

Everyone tries to buy or sew new clothes. During the week before Christmas, people go to confession to prepare themselves to receive Baby Jesus. Children are very pleased when they wish their elders "Happy Christmas" because they receive some money from them. Midnight Mass is more joyful than the normal Masses. At the end of the Mass families get together to have Christmas dinner. Afterwards they wish the parents, relatives and friends 'A Very Happy Christmas' At midnight the people burn fire crackers, blow car and motorcycle horns as a sign of celebration.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> people whose parents have died take flowers and candles to the cemetery. The elders bring those who are angry with one another together to make peace.

Timorese Christmas celebration starts on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December and goes until the 6<sup>th</sup> of January.

*Luisa Marques, Nancy de Almeida Ezequiel,  
Filomena de Oliveira*



### LETTER OF APPRECIATION

This is to acknowledge the work so far developed by Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies for the benefit of the people of Timor-Leste, particularly its work in relation to increasing Tetun Literacy.

Since the visit of Bishop Belo to the Josephite Chapel in North Sydney, Sydney, Australia in 1993, the Bishop had expressed his hope to have books in Tetun for the children of East Timor and that appeal led to the emergence of Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies in the following year. Since then, the Institute has produced a series of excellent books for children, with illustrations, which has helped to enhance our capacity to further develop Tetun, the national language.

Hence, on behalf of the People of Timor-Leste, I wish to express our gratitude for this work to the development of our national language and the preservation of our culture, with the hope that this investment will continue to help us face the challenges that lie ahead in the crucial area of education.

Palácio das Cinzas, 9 December, 2003

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO

*We can assure the President of Timor-Leste and his people that we will continue to do what we can towards the development of the national language, the preservation of culture and the work of education.*

*We acknowledge our many donors who continue to provide the finance to make the investment of which President Gusmão speaks.*

## NEW WEBSITE

The website of the Mary MacKillop Institute is now a reality and we encourage all our friends, supporters and helpers to visit it. Our address is [www.mmiets.org.au](http://www.mmiets.org.au).

## HEALTH BOOK

A recent practical initiative of the University of Sydney has been to assemble a basic health book for use in East Timor. It has been translated into Tetun by Mary MacKillop Institute staff member, Mrs Filomena de Oliveira, incorporating comments and suggestions made by health workers in East Timor, including Dr Rui Maria de Araújo, the Minister for Health. Clear and concise health handbooks in the language which most people understand is essential for the well-being of all.

**49% of the East Timorese population is under the age of 14**

## A TALE OF A COW

*Sr Thérèse Dagge RSJ*

A few years ago we received a donation from John and Dorothea Camilleri in the form of the proceeds from a calf they had sold. The donation was given to my sister, Sister Doreen Dagge RSJ, to pass on to a charity of her choice.

After donating the money from the sale of a cow with calf at hoof, this year John and Dorothea raised a herd of calves, and while waiting for the optimum time to sell, yarded and hand fed these calves, the lack of rain creating difficulties in the meantime. When it came time for them to go to the sale yards, a neighbour transported them gratis, the agent let the buyers know that the sale was for East Timor, and the buyers added a bit more despite their own hard times.

In three years John and Dorothea and friends have helped to raise some thousands of dollars, thus helping to feed the deep hunger for education which exists in Timor.

Like ripples in a pond, John and Dorothea's commitment to East Timor spreads through their home in Gippsland.

*Find us on*  
**[www.mmiets.org.au](http://www.mmiets.org.au)**

## GOLDEN JUBILEE

On December 6, we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Religious Profession of Sister Josephine Mitchell. It was a most happy occasion.

After Mass, visitors then gathered in the hall which had been decorated in fine style by Mr Sereneu Pereira, one of the East Timorese asylum seekers, still waiting for a decision on his case after seven years. Cakes were decorated superbly by Luisa Marques. As usual, the Timorese people put on a lovely spread of traditional food.

Over two hundred people filled the hall, many of them Timorese who have come to know and love Josephine over many years. Some of her family came, as well as a good number of Sisters of St Joseph and other Sisters. It was great to meet up again with the great variety of friends and supporters of East Timor who also enjoyed the night.

Traditional dancers welcomed Josephine, led by Dona Genoveva da Costa and her group. The East Timorese Consul-General, Mr Abel Guterres thanked and congratulated her on behalf of the East Timorese Government for her contribution to the life and the culture of the new nation.

Congratulations, Josephine, on 50 years of devoted and loving service. And thanks to the generous people who gave over \$1 700.00 as gifts, which will be used for the Literacy Program.

## MUSICAL NOTES

# Margaret Therese Cusack RSJ organised the production of a CD "Joseph Sings for East Timor" featuring the lovely voice of Joseph Duke. The proceeds are being applied to the Mary MacKillop Literacy programme and to the education of University students in East Timor. We are very grateful for this imaginative and wholehearted support. Thank you, Margaret, Joseph and all.

# António de Padua has achieved fine results in his musical education receiving a very creditable B+ in 6<sup>th</sup> and also passing 4<sup>th</sup> grade theory. Thanks to the help of his teacher, Sister Marie Levey RSJ and to the support of "Aunty Jen" (Jenny Coles) who provides him with so very much, Antonio is preparing to enter the Australian International Conservatorium of Music next year.



## GUGULEUR

*Josephine Mitchell RSJ*

People all over the country want to learn and to become self-determining, including people in the most remote villages. Recently, we were approached by villagers in the district of Guguleur, far west of Dili. The area consists of four villages comprising about 1000 people, none of whom have had a chance to go to school. On 9 October 2003 Sr Tess Ward, with other Mary MacKillop workers, travelled into this mountainous region to meet with the leaders and members of the communities. Some had walked for four hours to attend the meeting.

With the great dignity and hospitality typical of the Timorese, they presented their requests which ranged from a sewing machine and materials for the women, a guitar and a soccer ball for the youth, and assistance to build a simple school for the children. We were able to respond promptly to the first two requests. The third is a little more difficult but we are hopeful that assistance for the school will be forthcoming. In the meantime, 45 people between the ages of 10 and 35 have enrolled in a literacy class and we are privileged to assist them with books, resources and training for the two volunteer Timorese teachers. So the formal learning process has begun.

There are many stories like this one just as there are many people who are waiting and hoping for a friendly and genuine helping hand.

[www.mmiets@org.au](http://www.mmiets@org.au)

## THE RIGHT TO READ

*Susan Connelly RSJ*

Learning a language foreign to the home environment can be a daunting task for children in Australia, but at least they know they are learning something which has immediate benefit to them.

For East Timorese children it is a different situation entirely, as it is a question of having to discard one dominant language which was imposed on them, Bahasa Indonesia, and replacing it with another, Portuguese, in a very short space of time.

Regardless of which language becomes the language of commerce, education and media in East Timor, the children have the right to learn in their home language first. A large body of academic literature shows the benefits of mother-tongue education, part of which is the understanding that people achieve greater educational success and satisfaction if the initial language used in their instruction is the language with which they are most familiar.

Literacy in the home language is but one of the benefits gained by Timorese children who use the Mary MacKillop Institute's program. A child who becomes literate in the language of the home can more easily understand the purpose of reading and the relationship between the printed word and meaning.

If they have reading activities which relate to their daily experiences of life using the language of the home, they can more easily move to applying these skills to matters which are new, different and abstract. Tetun is spoken in 80% of the homes in East Timor. East Timorese children who learn in Tetun first will more easily learn any other language required of them.

*As Tess Ward, OLSH, says: "Children who have the opportunity to learn in their own language are dealing with one thing at a time and are able to concentrate on decoding, but if you're asking a child to learn to read and write in a language they don't speak you are asking the impossible."*

*(Tess Ward OLSH, Teacher Linguist)*

### And the Raffle winners are....

1st prize ~ **Child's Moto Bike:** Michael Dao

2nd prize ~ **Gourmet Hamper:** Mark Nicoletti

3rd prize ~ **Painting:** Mary Anne Grech

4th and subsequent prizes ~ **Watches:** M. Pinheiro, A. Lam, J. Molloy, M. Ryan, G.A Wotton, Sr Catherine Smith, E. Yi, G. Gates, C. Connelly, J. Quinn, C& T Timbs, D. de Oliveira, P. Buchanan, A.&F. de Oliveira, A. Cham, J. Saidey, P. Allen, L. Sammon, P. Brown, R. Doyle, B. Lane, B. Young, L. Ferguson, E. Ilott, U. Constable, G. Dang, Sr Catherine Smith, A. Cliverd, R. Knowles, Ngoc Chau Nguy. **Thanks so much to all who contributed to this raffle. We made over \$6000.00, which includes the generous donations which accompanied the ticket sales.**

**Thank you all !**