



## Ring of Fire – Australia April 2009

### [ Timor Leste Edition]

Since I began work at the Catholic Teachers' College in 2006, one of the more enjoyable and interesting jobs that I have done each year is to accompany a new, young, Timorese Tutor on the third year teaching prac and share the assessment task with her/him. Although my Tetun is not all that good you can tell in any language if a teacher is engaging with the children or not and what the reasons might be. In fact not having the language means that I concentrate more on the teacher although, it is not difficult to follow the lesson in the primary classes, if it is done well. While the first and second year observation and prac teaching is done in schools around Baucau in third year the students go back to their village and do their prac there in the hope that they will find employment in their own area when they graduate. For some reason I have been given some of the more remote places which has enabled me to visit parts of the country that I might never otherwise see.



My prac adventures have taken me to the western half of the country, right to the very border with Indonesia in the south west and close to Balibo on the north western side. As well I have visited the central mountains of the western side.

Since 2006 I have visited some very remote, poor schools and in one mountain village, with the most glorious view, the school had been evicted from the building

that they had used and were in the process of erecting a shed for the children. In another school the teachers appeared most dedicated but the principal did not often turn up. However, since the elections, the change of government and the gradual changes that are being introduced, the conditions in schools are improving. Over 90% of schools were destroyed in 1999 by the Indonesians as they left the country and certainly not all have been repaired. Over 80% of teachers have never had any formal, teacher training and most teaching is rote learning and copying from the blackboard as there are no resources or books for the children to use. Thus it is refreshing to go out to the distant schools and watch our young trainee teachers, in some of the most poverty stricken school, using aides that they have made and modern teaching strategies and actually trying to help the students to understand concepts and learn in a way that engages them. [Diaan Stuart ibvm]



Last September I travelled to East Timor as part of our Loreto 'Courage to Move' initiative. During my three month stay I immersed myself in the Timor way of proceeding working alongside Diaan at the Marist Teachers training College, journeying with a Perth group to various water projects in Emera, Funar and

Lautem, learning the basics of Tetun whilst living with Anne in Dili and finally experiencing life in the very rural district of Fohorem.

Undoubtedly Timor is a very poor country with very visible signs of unemployment and inadequate social and economic infrastructure particularly in the areas of health, education, road construction and agriculture. Life in the rural areas is a real struggle for the local people and urban programmes simply do not extend as far.

In one relatively small village I visited people were living without running water, and electricity with barely enough food. How to farm and work with the land in order to produce the best results for the local people was a real need in this village and many others. Children thirsting to learn in order to improve their situation lacked the essential and necessary tools for an effective education. Resources and materials to improve the quality of education and also to enhance the capacity for learning are in demand.

Although my time in Timor was relatively short I felt I became more aware of the many challenges ahead of this small country and I dare say ahead of me as I leave Australia for Timor. In the future months I am looking forward to deepening my understanding of Timor and to working with the Timorese people who continue to struggle and suffer long after independence was won. Timor has a long way to go before its people are granted the freedom and liberty they had long hoped for and it is my hope that I can do my bit, on behalf of our IBVM Sisters, to help our nearest neighbours and friends.

**Natalie Houlihan ibvm**

I first came to Timor Leste early in 2006 to take up a position with a local agency teaching literacy to women in rural villages, however my time was cut short by the sudden outbreak of violence in May, which brought the country close to collapse. Returning later that year, I worked as the Education Advisor for a local NGO that had a particular focus on improving the health of women and children. A subsequent breakdown in law and order led to my

second evacuation from the capital Dili in March 2007.



**Fabiola & Joana**

2008 saw me back in Timor once more. Despite assassination attempts on the president and prime minister, which nearly proved fatal in the case of the former, Jose Ramos Horta, the country is currently experiencing a period of relative stability. For the past six months I have been teaching English to the staff of several organizations, including the Ministry for Water and Sanitation and the Secretary of State for Infrastructure.

There is a strong desire on the part of many Timorese to learn English, because they realize it's the key to communicating with the world beyond their small island. Already fluent in four or five languages, they approach the learning of English with confidence only to stumble over out complex grammar, weird pronunciation and baffling spelling. I currently have eight different classes ranging from preliterate basic (unable to read and write in their mother tongue) to advanced, consisting of bright young things who have their sights set on gaining scholarships to study at Australian universities. We have a lot of fun together! Anne Kelly ibvm Easter 2009



**Diaan Stuart & Anne Kelly**