

Courage to Move – Loreto in Timor Leste

In 2005, as a result of a call from our international leadership team, every 'province' or region of the Loreto world wide institute was asked to have 'the courage to move'. Our Australian province thought that Timor Leste, so close a neighbour, coming recently from such a traumatic upheaval and with a very young population, might be a place we could make some first steps.



Left to right:
Sr Diaan Stuart (past student Coorparoo
1956-59) and Sr Anne Kelly (past principal
Coorparoo 1985-91)

Srs Anne Byrne, Anne Kelly and Diaan Stuart answered the call to begin this new venture. All three sisters had many years of service behind them, all had to begin the local language, Tetum, from scratch, and two had never worked in a foreign country. All had experience in our large and well established schools in Australia, and one sister also had experience working in refugee camps in northern Uganda.

Diaan Stuart and Anne Byrne began work in partnership with the Marist Brothers at the Catholic Teachers' College in Baucau, and with the Canossian Sisters there, while Anne Kelly began work with a local agency promoting women's literacy in rural areas. The college was begun in 2000 after the Marist Brothers were invited to commence a teachers' college by the bishop of the diocese of Baucau which takes in the whole of the eastern region of Timor Leste. In the last three years the sisters have been evacuated twice due to civil unrest. Anne Byrne has since returned to Australia and Sr Natalie Houlihan joined our contingent there in April 2009.

Sr Diaan Stuart is a past student of Loreto Coorparoo (1956-59).Diaan has been teaching at the Teachers' College in Baucau since 2006. In 2003 the College accepted its first group of student teachers. Prior to 2000, 90% of teachers were from Indonesia and most of these teachers returned to Indonesia after the East Timorese won independence. Thus the need for teacher training was critical. The college accepts applications from all the thirteen districts based on final Year 12 results plus an entrance interview. In 2006 the first students graduated. They had managed to continue studies despite the political difficulties. In 2007, 48 out of the 50 students who began in the second intake graduated and in 2008 only 38 graduated as a number of young students from the western districts did not return after the conflict between east and west that erupted in 2006. This year 53 will graduate as a few of the students from 2006 returned the next year.



Left: ACU Chancellor Julian McDonald cfc with graduating student Romana Beto from Fohorem 2008. Romana is teaching in her remote village school in the mountains close to the Indonesian border.

Diaan recently set up a crèche for the children of the trainee teachers and staff of the teacher's college. Diaan trained the two main staff members who have completed their TAFE Children's Services study. They were trained for a year before the crèche was opened and training is ongoing with a class each Saturday morning. Funding for the crèche is ending at the end of May so they are currently looking for funding. A volunteer is also required to help at the crèche. The volunteer would need to be trained and experienced in early childhood learning and come for at least one month or more as it takes time to build a relationship with young children especially in a different culture.

Sr Diaan Stuart shares with us her latest experiences in Timor Leste:

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 round and share the assessment task with her/him. Although my Tetum 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 teaching rounds are done in schools around Baucau in third year the students go back to their village and do their teaching round there in the hope that they will find employment in their own area when they graduate.

My teaching round adventures have taken me to parts of Timor that I otherwise wouldn't have seen. 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 ways that engages them. ***Diaan Stuart ibvm***



Sr Diaan Stuart at the crèche in Baucau. Marcelino is taking roll call (other children not in view).

Sr Anne Kelly is a past principal of Loreto Coorparoo (1985 – 1991). Anne went to Timor Leste early in 2006 to take up a position with a local agency teaching literacy to women in rural villages, however her time was cut short by the sudden outbreak of violence in May, which brought the country close to collapse. She returned later that year and worked as the Education Advisor for a local non government organisation that had a particular focus on improving the health of women and children. A subsequent breakdown in law and order led to her second evacuation from the capital Dili in March 2007.

Sr Anne Kelly shares with us her latest experiences in Timor Leste:

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 Ministry for Infrastructure (roads, power, water and sewerage). There is a strong desire on the part of many Timorese to learn English, because they realise 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 our complex grammar, weird pronunciation and baffling spelling. I currently have nine different classes ranging from Preliterate (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 or Indonesian universities. We have a lot of fun together! **Anne Kelly ibvm**



Mary Ward International Australia in Timor Leste

Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) currently provides financial assistance for living expenses of students originating from other towns who are studying at Marist Teachers College in Baucau. These students would otherwise be unable to continue their education due to basic living expenses.

MWIA is also funding a Business Diploma scholarship for a Timorese woman in Baucau. The diploma will equip this young woman with the skills and confidence to make a difference in her community.

To find out more about how you can support the Catholic Teachers' College Crèche in Baucau or other MWIA projects please visit www.loreto.org.au or email us at mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au.

When you support MWIA you join a global network of like minded individuals, families, groups and businesses, who value social justice, health access and education for all. Join us and make a difference.