

FRIENDS AND PARTNERS WITH EAST TIMOR PRESIDENT'S REPORT - 02-11-2009

Overview

As the situation in East Timor continues to change, FPET has consolidated to our core activities -



- Supporting our PALMS volunteers and their team to continue their programmes of Community Health and Community Development in Atabae
- Support for the youth of the parish – teaching and trade scholarships, learning English, support for sporting competitions on special occasions.

The year was relatively stable politically. The Government has finally moved on labour-intensive infrastructure projects especially roadworks. This has meant more money in communities, but means that workers for other activities are often in short supply and has reduced demand for further education – both Baucau and Don Bosco report a big drop in applications.

One of our big headaches was removed in August. After withdrawing from paying teachers salaries, we watched in dismay as the months went by and nobody was accepting responsibility to pay the parish teachers. Then August saw 15 parish teachers invited to register with the government. They were then offered \$160/month, backdated to January – an answer to many prayers!

The GRM grant of US\$30 000 was a major boost to our budget, as it financed most of the ambitious health programme.

Parish Relationship

FPET has endeavoured to foster the partnership between Brisbane parishes and Atabae Parish. However we are operating under great difficulty, with Fr John in Atabae completely unhelpful to the relationship. We have requested the SVD order to replace him with someone more suitable to a partnership, but he is still there. We manage to continue without his support, but pray for a change in this situation.

At this end, some good things are happening. Our key parish of St John's Wood / The Gap has had a change in Parish Priest and a significant turnover of Parish Pastoral Council members. I am pleased to report continued support from Fr Neil and the Council. In spite of postponement, a long weekend with many away, and the intangibles of the GFC and The Gap storm, FPET ran a successful appeal in May.



St Peter Chanel School P&F gave us \$1000 towards support of a trainee teacher at Baucau College this year. They have followed it up with another \$1000 to help bring out two of the Baucau graduates to Brisbane for several weeks next year, and Mater Dei School is promising similar support for this project. They will work with our teachers and promote interest in Timor among the students and our support community at large.

Operational

Regular meetings were on the first Monday of each month and were an alternating mix of general and committee meetings. Everyone was invited to the committee meetings and encouraged to participate. Through circumstances, Margaret and David Hall were able to attend 4 of our meetings, which was very productive.



Only one newsletter issue was produced, but another is due this month. Thanks to Nick and Brendan and contributors.

Nick continues to maintain the high-quality FPET website. Thanks, Nick, for keeping it updated and interesting.

PALMS Volunteers

Despite some health setbacks, Margaret and David continue to achieve success for our partnership. The Health Programme goes from strength to strength. They have coped with the loss of senior staff in Jose [working for UN] and Maria [pregnant], and are training replacements. They have consulted with a lawyer to draw up suitable contracts for employment for their teams. The lease on the Dili house has been extended and it continues to be well-utilised. As well as convenient accommodation, it has provided a venue for Margaret to run courses in "Introduction to Preventative & Community Health" with participants including Health Department, Bairo Pite Clinic and other NGO's.

They have put a huge effort into trying to find suitable candidates for further study at teachers college, trade school and more recently, intensive English courses. A heartfelt thankyou to Margaret and David who are achieving success in building the partnership and in helping the Atabae community.



Visits

There were no FPET-funded visits to East Timor this year. Gary and Lynne Stone visited in April. Gary made another visit with the Federal Police and kept us briefed on the changing situation in the country.

President Ramos-Horta made a brief stopover in Brisbane in March and chose to stay with Gary and Lynne. Several FPET members had dinner with him.

Dr Dan Murphy from Bairo Pite Clinic in Dili attended a conference in Brisbane in July, and spent a morning with me at the Mater Hospital and next day had morning tea with FPET members. Dan provides wonderful collaborative assistance to our Health Team in Atabae.

East Timorese community

We have continued our links with the small East Timorese community in Brisbane –

- Independence Day Mass & Dinner and meeting with the Ambassador, Dr da Silva – May 23.
- Attending planning meetings for the establishment of an East Timor Centre at “Benarrawa” at Graceville. This will be a focus for local Timorese, as well as a vehicle for interaction with the Australian community.

Highlights of 2009

- Purchase of 2nd-hand **Land Rover** to take the pressure off our battle-scarred Troop Carrier and increase effectiveness of programmes. Already more villages are being visited more regularly, and Dave can simultaneously move ahead with his community development projects.
- Successful **consignment** of a collection of computers, microscopes and health equipment from Brisbane to Darwin to Dili where they all found good homes. Thanks to the 4 J’s for their efforts – Jack, John, James and Joel.
- Commencement of **Adult Literacy classes** at the CHC with Jose as teacher on the weekends. This is a start in addressing a big need. We are investigating supporting another PALMS volunteer to coordinate voluntary education activities. The loyalty of Jose to FPET is also very heartening.
- Two parishes (Grovely and Albany Creek) are exploring the FPET model of **parish partnerships**. The Halls organised the itinerary and transport when the parishes sent 4 representatives to Timor in July to investigate further, and links have been established with Atauro Island and Liquica Parishes. It has always been our hope that other parishes would follow our lead into the mutual rewards of partnership with a parish in East Timor.



Thanks



I want to express my appreciation to our office bearers for performing their jobs with distinction - Vice-President Shirley, Treasurer

Jack, new Secretary John O'Hara (who stepped up when Joy could not continue), emergency Secretary Helen (who fills in whenever John is unavailable) and Project Officer Nick. Thanks also to PALMS for supporting FPET in our mutually beneficial partnership.

Once again I sincerely thank our regular meeting attenders, and all who have contributed to running FPET. Finally, thanks to our donors who make it all possible.

Last Words

FPET continues to invest our efforts in capacity-building – improving the community situation in Atabae (community health and development), but at the same time helping local young people acquire skills which will benefit their country. I see this as the best way to fulfil our mission of friendship and partnership.

Jim Johnson