

# ADOPTIONS AT A DISTANCE

Newsletter No. 3, March 2002

East Timor



Hand-embroidered card from the children at Escola Canossa to thank supporters of the "Adoptions at a Distance" project.

**"When I help the children write to their sponsors I feel uplifted with an immense gratitude to God for having sent you into our lives."** – Sr Aurora Pires



## AN UNFORGETTABLE TRIP

Aida Barbosa and Luciana Cavalcanti – from the Women's Focolare in Perth, Australia – spent more than three weeks, during the Christmas holidays, in East Timor, visiting various centres associated with the Adoptions at a Distance project.

### Escola Canossa

An important part of their stay was to visit some poor families in Dili whose children attend Escola Canossa in Comoro, a Catholic Institution run by the Cannossian Sisters. Thanks to the "Adoptions at a Distance" project, these children are receiving help with their school fees as well as food, clothing and medical treatment.



**Above:** One of the families in Dili whose children are part of the Adoptions at a Distance project.

**Left (top):** Sr Aurora and Luciana with the children who attend the Canossian Jardim Infantil (Kindergarten)

**Left (bottom):** Sr Francisca and the primary school children pose for a group photo with Aida and Luciana.



Sister Aurora Pires, in charge of "Adoptions at a Distance" at the Canossian School, wrote: "We admire the great work the Holy Spirit is doing through the Focolare Movement. Yes, unity which we greatly need, is our cry above all in our little country which has suffered so much and is still submerged in chaotic divisions, misunderstandings and ethnic prejudices.

We hope to learn from your Movement, so rich in charity and unity, to proclaim the Good News.

When I help the children write to their sponsors I feel uplifted with an immense gratitude to God for having sent you into our lives. Your untiring efforts give great promise for the future for the children of East Timor." ■

# Album 2002



*Above: A group photo of the children and adolescents at Dare Institute.*

*Left: Children attending the formation centre in Betano.*

*Below: Margarida Pires, local coordinator of Adoptions at a Distance, shows the children how to make the "Dice of the Art of Christian Loving".*



## Institute Main Alin Iha Kristo

Aida and Luciana also visited the three orphanages, at Dare, Aileu and Viqueque, run by ISMAIK, a Secular Institute founded by Sr Maria de Lourdes Martins (known as Manalu) in the diocese of Dili in 1997. Sr Lourdes tries to educate the orphans to become independent and eventually self-sufficient. Besides attending the local school where the use of the native language Tetum is encouraged, the children are taught catechism, as well as agriculture, cooking and such crafts as sewing and embroidering.



During their stay, Aida and Luciana had the pleasure of meeting Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo (Bishop of Dili, East Timor, and winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize) who was on a visit to the ISMAIK Centre in Dare. Here is Bishop Belo with Sr Lourdes and the children of the Institute.



During their stay in Dare, Aida and Luciana taught the children how to make soap and ceramics with supplies sent from Perth and New Zealand. They also took many Christmas gifts, school supplies, art and crafts material, seeds for planting vegetables and flowers, donated by friends and people from various parishes and community groups around Australia.

They had the opportunity of giving “lessons” to the children on the Focolare Movement's “art of Christian loving” using the Gen 4 dice. This was very much appreciated by children and educators alike as everyone is keen to learn, as individuals and as a people, how to put into practise their Christian beliefs, especially in the present difficult situation of their country.

In one of her letters, Sr Lourdes wrote *“I am happy God has led me to meet the Focolare Movement. I thank God for your friendship and solidarity in this struggle for the welfare and the development of the poor. I feel we share the same spirituality on which we can base our passion to create a more united and loving world and to work for the advancement of the Church.”* ■



**Bottom:** The children and students at Aileu are happy with their gifts.



**Top:** The children present Aida and Luciana with the gift of a typical East Timorese woven scarf.

**Luciana distributes gifts to the children. Christmas gifts were donated by people from Perth, Melbourne and New Zealand.**

**Above:** One of the formation centres.



# Organizacao de Desenvolvimento Basico (ODB)

Basic Development Organisation



**Left:** A group photo of the children at ODB orphanage with Celestino Pereira (back row, right) and his collaborators.

**Above:** Current sleeping accommodation is makeshift, but a new dormitory is on the way.

Another special moment in Aida and Luciana's trip was to visit Organizacao de Desenvolvimento Basico (ODB), an orphanage in Dili, run since 1999 by an East Timorese couple who have four children of their own.

With the help of friends who were inspired by their generosity and unwavering dedication, **Celestino Pereira** and his wife have been able to provide food and shelter for **43 girls and boys** who have been abandoned or orphaned due to the civil war. They have done this despite very limited resources.

With the help of members of the Australian Army, it has been possible for them to build toilets and a kitchen and

to install a water pump. They are currently in the process of building a dormitory.

Unable to get financial support for the children from aid agencies, they have relied largely on local benefactors who are also poor. Through the "Adoptions at a Distance" project, Celestino hopes that the children in their care may be able to be provided with such basic necessities as food, clothing, education and ongoing medical treatment.

In March this year, ODB received official recognition as an orphanage by the relevant local government authorities. ■

## The people begged us not to forget them

**A**s they travelled from one village to another, to visit the institutes participating in our project, Aida and Luciana saw first hand the great poverty and the atmosphere of tension and violence which still prevails in this country traumatised by 25 years of civil war. They shared in the life of many people and heard moving stories of determination and courage. They were touched by their love and hospitality but above all by their great faith in God which has sustained them, and continues to sustain them, in difficult times.

There is the sense that people cherish their regained independence and want to move forward. Preparations are underway for the country's National Independence (19-20 May 2002) when the United Nations hands over the reins to this newly established democratic government and East Timor will stand on its feet as the first new, free country of the millenium.

In their report Aida and Luciana wrote: **"Everyone, and especially the children, welcomed us and loved us wholeheartedly. They expressed this in their gifts, songs, poems and dances. They begged us not to forget them and asked for our prayers. We assured them of this, especially during this time of preparation for their National Independence."**

