

ADOPTIONS AT A DISTANCE

Newsletter No. 4, December 2002

We wish to thank our sponsors for their kindness and generosity throughout the year.

Words of thanks and encouragement from the sponsors ...

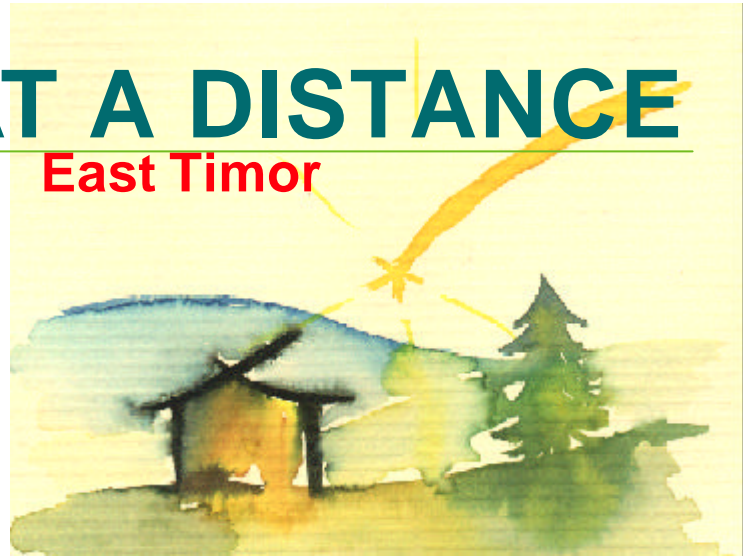
“To our sponsored children in East Timor,

We are employees in a company who wish to show our solidarity with disadvantaged children in the world. To this end, we donate a percentage of our salary each month. There are now 158 of us in the firm who participate in this scheme and the idea has spread to our other agencies too. The proprietors of the firm have also joined us in our initiative and they donate an equal amount of money.

In one of our offices we have all your photos on display, and each time we look at them we think of you studying or playing, and we hope that you are enjoying good health, peace and serenity. Together with you we want to build a better world.

Thank you for your good wishes. We wish you and all your families, and all those involved in Adoptions at a Distance, a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.”

(Cartiera San Marco Pty Ltd, Italy)



East Timor

“Dear New Families,

Thank you for the beautiful news that you always send us. We were so happy to receive the card from the child we have sponsored. It was a great gift and it has brought our family closer to her. Our sons study English at school so they’re learning to read all the news and greetings that Lucia sends us. They feel they now have a sister.

Our support for this initiative relies more on providence than on our economic means, but it has been a great gift to our family which is becoming enriched with the whole of humanity.” (Mercedi Family, Italy)

... and from the children

“I am happy and grateful for your generous help. I am now getting a good education. My mother thanks you too.” Aurelia

“Thank you for your kindness. I like my school as there are desks and chairs and the teachers come every day. I am slowly learning how to read as last year I missed many months of school.” Joao

In our last newsletter, we had an article on **Organizacao de Desenvolvimento Basico (ODB)**, an orphanage run by **Celestino Pereira**. Celestino, and his collaborators, have been in contact with us over these months and they’re very happy that their “dream” of a fully functioning home for orphaned children has finally materialised thanks to the generous contribution of sponsors and benefactors. Aside from providing the basic needs of food and clothing for the children, there is now a new dormitory, a kitchen and a study area. Plans are now underway for the construction of a dining room and additional sleeping accommodation for the children.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM ALL OF US!



Celestino with Scott, a member of the Australian Armed Forces who helped with some of the construction work earlier this year.

Canossian School and Kindergarten

On 20th October 2002, Sr Aurora Pires, wrote thanking everyone for their financial support for the children who have now started a new school year. They have all



passed, most of them with good results. The funds received from the sponsors have paid for the children's school fees and for other needs. Often this help has alleviated great suffering.

In a letter to a sponsor in Australia, she wrote:

“Octavio was badly burnt at the age of three and had to have plastic surgery on his legs. With your help he now comes to school by bus causing less stress on his legs.

He lives in a makeshift house in a very poor area of Dili. The windows of the house were hammered tightly shut, so it was dark inside. Two months ago Octavio's little brother was at home on his own. He lit a candle which caught fire to the mosquito net and burnt most of their belongings. Mercifully, nothing happened to the child. Once again your help for the family was timely. We were able to change the wall panels, replacing them with transparent ones to allow light to penetrate.”

Free at last!

In May 2002, after 450 years of continuous foreign occupation, East Timor became the world's newest independent state.

On May 20, 2002, a new flag flew over East Timor as the people of the world's newest nation celebrated their independence. The red, gold and black lone star flag of East Timor slowly made its way up the flag pole and loud cheers erupted from the crowd.

For most of the estimated 200,000-strong crowd packed into a site some 10 kilometers outside the capital, Dili, it was the moment they had been waiting to see.

“We have been waiting for this for more than 20 years,” said 40 year-old Antonio who had traveled all day from his home in the town of Baucau just to see the ceremony.

“We love to see it and that's why I am here, to see the flag to be raised.”

The declaration of independence was followed by the swearing in of East Timor's first president, former freedom fighter Xanana Gusmao.

The event marked the peak of several hours of ceremony, beginning with a Roman Catholic Mass at which the new nation's flag was blessed and followed by performances of song and dance. Sr Aurora Pires said that the children from the Canossian School raised white pigeons and doves which were released during the Independence Day festivities.

Indonesia ruled East Timor with an iron fist after it invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975.

In the following 24 years some 200,000 people — about one quarter of the 1975 population — were killed or died from famine.

Concluding his inaugural speech Gusmao alluded to the massive economic and social challenges facing what is not only the world's newest nation, but also one of its poorest.

“Our independence will have no value,” he said, “if all the people in East Timor continue to live in poverty and continue to suffer all kinds of difficulties.”

Most East Timorese say they do not expect their lives to transform overnight as a result of independence, but many have high hopes that if they can work together they can build a better future.

For 26-year-old Domingas Bui, the coming of independence



East Timor now has its own proud flag. The new stamps, such as this one above, mark a momentous time for the East Timorese people.

was a time to reflect on the violence of the past and to celebrate her country's new-found freedom. “I feel free tonight, no more fear,” she said.

In recent days it has been sad to see rioting and some deaths in Dili. This is perhaps a reflection of the extreme difficulties faced by young people east Timor and the long period of trauma since 1975. We pray for stability and hope for the people of this country.

Nobel Peace Laureate, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, who was such a prominent figure during the period of Indonesian rule has resigned. He has been ill and will be going to Rome “to be sent where the Pope wishes me to go”. Again we pray for for him, for his successor and the Catholic community in East Timor.