

“That they may have life.”

One of the most powerful statements in the Scriptures, about Jesus mission and our mission, is that powerful sentence of John’s gospel. “I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full”. (John 10:10) A group initiated in the parish of St Johns Wood - The Gap have been making that Scripture come true for our friends and partners in East Timor. This year marks the 11th year of a partnership that has been a blessing to all of us and significantly has saved the lives and restored the hope of many people in East Timor.

In this report I want to celebrate how we have been loving our neighbours, so that they might have life, by outlining what “*Friends and Partners with East Timor*” have achieved in the last 12 months; what we hope to do in the next 12 months; and how you can continue to be a friend and partner to these people.

Our partner parish of Atabae, in East Timor is a remote rural community of 17 villages, and about 10,000 people. They live in very mountainous terrain where it is difficult to grow food. There are many widows and orphans throughout the community. Since 2000, we have been visiting them and arranging for them to visit us, and in doing so - developing a relationship.

In the early years, we helped rebuild their chapels, and we bought them a parish vehicle which continues to be the main transport in the area. Over time we have funded the building of four schools. They are all now oversubscribed for students as the population increases. In 2006 we sent PALMS volunteers, David and Margaret Hall to live in the parish, and commence developing a health training program in the parish. They have trained a number of community nurses and managed many minor projects.

The work of FPET in Brisbane is managed by a committee of volunteers led by Jim Johnson, and I now like to provide you an overview of the projects that we have been managing over the last 12 months.

Firstly, we are delighted to now have with us here in Brisbane, Jose, Serv, Abel and Abia, who have won scholarships to spend four years in Australia, learning English and then to study agriculture at Gatton Agricultural college.

In February 2011 we deployed another PALMS volunteer, Anne Chapman, to Atabae as an English teacher. She has quickly developed her own team of Maria, John and Alfonse to assist her. They have more than 100 adult students on courses at the moment. We are also funding 10 students in a life skills program in Dili.

Margaret has continued to bring on new staff in training to be community nurses. Our primary health clinic in Atabae has had some extensions to cater for the wide range of programs it's providing. Earlier this year we provided four sewing machines for the women to learn to sew. A range community health education programs are run daily. A nutrition and feeding program is offered weekly for the poorest families in the community. In all this, our focus has been on developing the capacity of the local Timorese to conduct and continue this training in the future. Of course, the reality is that this staffs we have trained are providing real healthcare, indeed life saving interventions on a regular basis.

We now have a strong relationship with Dr. Dan Murphy, who runs a small hospital in Dili and provides us with the next higher level of medical care. He has about 130 beds and provides acute-care for our parishioners. On our visit in January, he took us on his ward rounds and we saw the tragic state of the health needs in this country. Numerous patients have tuberculosis, malaria and birth deformities. All forms of medicine and medical supplies are in short supply. In January, there was no medicine for tuberculosis available in the country. He asked me if we could get help

in Australia for a little girl named Fatima. Tragically, she died 10 minutes later. I sat with her weeping parents and wept and prayed with them. Of course we have saved many lives before this by earlier interventions. But the reality is that healthcare remains the major problem for these people.

In our most recent visit in January, we also met with the teachers of schools that we have funded. We were pleased that the government has now started paying their salaries, after we paid them for three years. But they explained that their class sizes are now quite unmanageable with each teacher having up to 100 students, which have to be divided into morning and afternoon shifts. We are continuing to fund further students at teachers college, to help in the schools. We also took delivery of several hundred desks and chairs that were shipped to Timor by Rotary. And we are in the process of purchasing new furniture for the many boarding students at the junior high school. In due course, the parish priest would like to see us develop a senior high school.

The parish now has a very strong young adults group of more than 100 who we have supported with some furniture and a laptop. It was just wonderful to see the energy that they have to want to learn and contribute to their society. They regularly organize sporting and cultural activities in the community.

We have now met with the newly appointed Bishop of the new diocese of Maliana, Bishop Norbert Amaral, who has warmly welcomed us in our ministry. We provided him with funds to purchase a photocopier for printing of his diocesan newsletter. We met with two new deacons, Hipolito and Marsal, who we have funded through seminary over the past seven years... They will be ordained as priests in August and will assist in the new diocese of Maliana. We are funding four others in training as well. We have a new parish priest in Father Sipri Kakut, who is very appreciative of us, and it is pleasing to see the church is full of a Sunday.

In January, after mass, we met with Fr Sipri and the parish counselors and confirmed their priorities and particular needs at the moment. At the outset, they expressed their sincere gratitude for our faithful and continued support for them. They identified three immediate priorities: to build an additional five classrooms at the main parish centre, to install a water supply system throughout the parish complex, and to provide refrigeration in three clinics in the parish. Of course while facilities are important our key outcomes are about developing people and so we are providing basic wages for 13 staff that assist us in these programs.

A particularly joyful outcome for us this last year, has been to see us support the development of two further parish partnerships with Albany Creek linking with Atauro island, and Grovely parish linking with Liquica parish.

Our future plans see us maintaining our health programme; developing and sustaining our education programmes; funding more students; funding more classrooms and assisting with water supply. All of these are basic human need issues.

We would invite you to consider, how you can be a friend and partner to these people. You can help in a number of ways; by praying for these people; and by making a donation, which can be tax-deductible should you need it to be. To maintain and our current programs will require approximately \$100,000 this year. Brisbane people have been generous in the past, and we hope and pray that you will continue to be generous in supporting these efforts, in being friends and partners to the Timorese. Please check out our website at [www.fpet.org.au](http://www.fpet.org.au). Donations can be sent to FPET, Po Box 281, West Ashgrove.

The assurances we give you are that we are meeting the needs that the local community identify, and that all of your giving, contributes to improving the lives of these people.

We would, of course, welcome you to join us at one of our monthly meetings at Mater Dei church, West Ashgrove, on the first Monday of every month at 7:30pm. There is work to be done, but also some fellowship with like-minded folks.

Timor remains one of the poorest countries on Earth, and the government struggles to deliver services of any substance, outside the main towns. But we are making a difference. We are giving them life as disciples of Jesus.

The President of East Timor, Dr José Ramos Horta has asked me to thank you for your continued support in giving his people life. The people of Atabae have asked me to thank you for helping them. Thank you for being their friends and partners in life .

Thank you  
Thank you all

Deacon Gary Stone

*Deacon Gary Stone is a minister of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, working primarily in chaplaincy to the ADF and AFP, and is a founding member of FPET*