

Christian Brothers withdraw from Timor Leste

Recently Br Peter Clinch on behalf of the Oceania Leadership Team announced that the Province would be withdrawing from ministry in Timor Leste from the end of 2018. This difficult decision will bring much sadness to the many people from the Edmund Rice Movement around Oceania who have lived and worked and supported our ministry in Timor Leste.

In so many ways the ministry of Comunidade Edmund Rice (CER) has mirrored the life of the Province and the Congregation. The early dream to walk in solidarity with the people of East Timor came from the leadership of St Francis Xavier Province in Queensland and the Northern Territory. Br Francis Hall from England and Br Patrick Payne from Ireland were two of the Brothers who supported Br Dan Courtney (pictured on right) in the early days of the mission there. Over the years more than 200 Edmund Rice people have walked with the vulnerable people and fragile nation of Timor Leste.



Br Dan Courtney

From New Zealand people like Sr Gail Henry, Sam Drumm and Shane Coleman gave so much to improve the daily lives of the people there through teaching the women in the villages to sew, teaching in the local schools and visiting the people in their homes. The extraordinary generosity of the community of St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace has been remarkable. The Terrace Timor Network is a wonderful model of respect-filled partnership where parents and former parents of Terrace students have worked tirelessly to improve the standards of education, health and livelihood for the people of the villages and have done so for over ten years now. The schools of Edmund Rice Education Australia have been so generous and loyal to the Timor Leste mission. The HELP group from St Patrick's Shorncliffe, St Edmund's Ipswich and St Laurence's South Brisbane have gone up year after year and with the help of Br



Peter Coe, Adrian Creedy and very generous teachers from the school worked with the trade students of the colleges and the local people to build classrooms, kindergartens, community centres and more. In addition to this Immersion groups from Waverley, Terrace, St James' and other EREA communities have built wonderfully warm relationship with the local communities in Timor. Much of the EREA support has been in kind and the financial support of so many EREA schools - but especially the Queensland EREA schools - have provided several four wheel drive ambulances and other key infrastructure for the mission there.

Some sixty Edmund Rice volunteers have worked humbly with the Christian Brothers on the ground in Timor Leste. Jennifer Earle, Renee MacGregor, Sr Rita Hayes sgs, Wendy Baker, Adrian Creedy, Barry Hinton, Chris Zammit, Katrina Powell-Carey, Dr Tim Gray, Alex Johnston and so many others have lived and worked among the people there. These volunteers and the Brothers have been supported by a huge community of family and friends back in Oceania and this

support has been financial, moral, personal and spiritual. In small and big ways people have raised funds for Timor, have visited the Brothers there in their isolation, have written, skyped and phoned in care and support. Several Rotary Clubs but especially Inverell, several parishes and Religious Orders both in Australia and in Timor itself (Warwick Parish, Fr John Herd, the Marist Brothers, the Jesuits and Mercy Sisters) have supported the ministry through good times and bad. Our friends from the Edmund Rice Foundation have been constant in their support of our projects and giving us an avenue to tell our good news stories.

The ministry in Timor Leste has seen the Edmund Rice charism at its best. To this day Br Dan Courtney is honoured among the people of the Railaco villages in the hills behind Dili. Br Dan stood with courage beside the ordinary people in the face of Indonesian aggression and put his life on the line with them. Dan was evacuated from Timor at the last minute and at the insistence of the local people and returned as soon as he could after the departure of the Indonesian military.



Pedro one of the CER workers outside one of the CER kindergartens with his artwork.

When the announcements of the withdrawal of the Brothers were made in the villages of the Ermera district last week, many tears were shed. It was humbling to witness the deep affection the people have for the Brothers. The presence of the Brothers and so many others from the Edmund Rice Movement has been one of the powerful and positive constants in the lives of the ordinary people. Many Religious Orders when they have gone to Timor have remained in the larger cities. Br Dan Courtney and consequently Br Bill Tynan and Br Frank Hennessy (our Ministry Leaders) have chosen to live with the ordinary people in a very poor rural area.

The Christian Brothers have had a proud history in Timor Leste. It was in 1999 that Br Dan Courtney from the then St Francis Xavier Province was missioned to live and work among the people of Timor Leste. Dan led the ministry there from 1999 until his motor bike accident in 2001 which resulted in his being rushed back to Brisbane where he spent the next eleven years in a coma until his death in 2012.

Br Bill Tynan led Comunidade Edmund Rice with great energy and generosity from 2002 until 2012. For the last five years Br Frank Hennessy has generously fulfilled the role of Ministry Leader there. Over the years some fourteen Brothers have ministered in Timor Leste and we are grateful for their faithful service. On behalf of the Province we wish to thank Brs Jim D'Arcy, Patrick Payne, Francis Hall, Vin Haseler, Richard Walsh, Barry Callan, Bill Tynan, Peter Coe, Frank Hennessy, Phil Joyner, Ray Weston, Bob



Br Frank Hennessy with some of the kindergarten teachers.

Chambers and David Standen for all that they did for the people of one of the poorest nations on the planet.

The decision to withdraw from Timor Leste has been especially difficult for the present community of Brothers. We are grateful to Br Barry Callan who has worked teaching English to many seminarians of the Diocese of Dili as well as being a great presence in the Brothers community and providing hospitality to many visitors. Br Frank Hennessy (Ministry Leader) and Br Peter Coe have travelled up each Monday to work with the people in the Railaco District in the mountains at the back of Dili continuing the great work that Br Bill Tynan had passed on to them.



*Br Bill Tynan with some of his
Timorese fiends.*

As the Province prepares to move on from ministry in Timor Leste every effort is being made to ensure that the people we have built such great relationships with over many years will continue to be supported after we leave. Over the coming months the nature of the future support structures that cannot be reliant upon the Province for neither leadership nor governance will become clearer.

While this announcement will bring much sadness it is also a chance to pause and reflect in gratitude for the blessings that the privilege of this ministry has bestowed upon the Province. We will continue to hold the people of Timor Leste in our prayers. In November 2018 there will be rituals of closure, celebration and grieving in Timor Leste as the Brothers prepare to leave. In January 2019 there will be opportunities to thank the many people from the Edmund Rice Movement who have also been part of the Timor Leste story and to ritualise the closure of our direct day to day involvement there. These celebrations will be in Brisbane.

Br Damien Price
Coordinator of Developing Nations
Oceania Province