

*Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit..[Rule of Saint Albert]***JPIC 105 – MAY 2021**

Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian . [Regula Sto Alberto]



## Carmelites Respond to East Timor Floods

A reflection by Mayra Walsh - Community Development Ministry Coordinator for the Carmelite Province in Australia & Timor Leste.



In the middle of the night on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, thousands of people in Dili and across East Timor woke to flood waters entering their homes. It was the third day of continuous torrential rain caused by a weather event that would eventually be named Cyclone Seroja and recorded as a category 1 cyclone.

Houses built alongside rivers, canals and in low-lying areas near the beach were particularly vulnerable. Many homes were washed away, some were buried under landslides, others were filled with water up to peoples' waists. Thousands of families worked through the night trying to stem the flow of the water and reduce the damage to their homes and belongings. While others faced dangerous situations and were forced to flee with just the clothes they were wearing. 45 people died because of the cyclone; over 25,000 households have reportedly been affected by floods across the country; and over 10,000 people have sought shelter in temporary evacuation facilities in Dili.



A natural disaster like these floods is undoubtedly tragic and traumatic. The initial aftermath is emotionally and physically intense. And yet it is also a moment for collaboration and connection, a space

in which people can directly express the values of justice and peace. In the words of the Carmelite Brothers in Timor, it has been a time to be 'pro-active' and 'open-hearted'. Having not experienced any flooding in the Carmelite community houses themselves, the Brothers and seminarians were able to immediately launch into outreach activities with their local communities.



In Hera, situated just outside Dili, Fr. Fausto O'Carm has described several homes that are "filled with mud as high as the windows. You can't even walk into those houses, it's just a wall of mud". Many families who live in the community around the Carmelite House there have been damaged, while some have lost everything. "There are 13 families who we are now completely responsible for. They have all lost their homes," explains Fr. Fausto.

Fr. Exposto O'Carm also described the situation in Hera after the floods. "There are four evacuation centres here in Hera now with over 200 families registered, but there are so many people who have been impacted and haven't gone to an evacuation centre. Some are staying at their family's houses or with their neighbours. One family is living in a

simple shack in their rice fields that they usually just use for shade during the harvest season." The Carmelite Brothers in Hera have been using their cars and trucks to visit rural and isolated communities. "We have visited every hamlet in Hera. More than 400 families. For all the people we visited, we offered basic things like rice, noodles, cooking equipment and clothes, because they had nothing."

In the days following the cyclone, the Carmelite Brothers were sometimes the first people to make contact with flood victims who live outside the main town centre in Hera. "It really was an emergency. When we saw people, well, we weren't really thinking about the donated goods, we were just really focusing on the people. Our hearts were crying in that moment. We were also crying. We felt so sad. We weren't actually interested in the things we had with us, we were really only interested in the people and their suffering. Whether it was clothes or kitchen utensils or sacks of rice. There was so much, we just handed it out," Fr. Exposto said.



Emergencies have a way of bringing people together and we have seen this play out on a global level during this flood. The sense of solidarity and generosity internationally has been incredible, with donations received from all over the world. This funding has assisted the Carmelites' initial response and will have a tangible impact on many family's ability to recover effectively from this natural disaster.

However, sometimes the development sector and the media can specifically highlight the value of international aid, causing us to miss the equally important stories of strong local communities supporting each other through hardship

The day after the major flooding, when many roads were still blocked and the water hadn't yet receded, Fr. Fausto went to the front door of the Carmelites House in Hera and found several plastic bags of

donated food. Later, when more food was delivered, he found out that members of the local Carmelite Youth Group in Hera were the ones driving the initiative. "This experience has really opened our hearts. Because they [the youth group] didn't say anything to us. They just went out and bought rice, went out and bought food, bought things for the kitchen. They collected it all together, then they divided it up so it could all be handed out. I asked them, 'where did you get the money to do this?' And they said, 'we collected it among ourselves'. Some people just put in \$1, other people put in more. I was so surprised. I spoke with the other Brothers and we also contributed money to their collection to help their efforts. This is something that really was amazing."

I think this is what justice and peace look like in an emergency. It can be a time when nobody is left behind – that's social justice. Helping hands are extended to one another in an expression of real egalitarian spirit. Also, peace can be found in the intense collaboration – many people working together to solve immediate and urgent problems. And there is a sense of peace in the strong connections that are made when communities experience shared grief and hardship.

Now in Hera the water has receded, a lot of the mud and debris has been cleared away and some evacuated families have been able to return to their homes.

For the Carmelites, this means we have entered a period of assessments and planning. While it is still an emergency response to meet urgent basic needs, we need to think strategically in order to make good decisions about who we can support and how we can most effectively assist those people to recover.

A lingering question I have is: those values of justice and peace that we saw expressed so clearly in so many small and large actions that people took during the first weeks after the floods – is it possible to hold onto those sentiments and embed them in this longer and more complicated recovery process? Can we build back better, in a way that reinforces social equity and cohesion? As usual, there is no simple answer. There are many factors that will have to be considered in coming weeks, but I know the Carmelite Brothers in Timor will continue to be pro-active and open-hearted as they find a way forward. .... Mayra

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT THE EMERGENCY APPEAL, CONTACT**

The Carmelites - Australia & Timor-Leste: [carmelcare@carmelites.org.au](mailto:carmelcare@carmelites.org.au)

**Carmel Impact is a charity established by The Carmelites of Australia & Timor-Leste to help those in need in Timor-Leste. When you give in support of our Timor Education and Community Development programs along with Emergency Appeals, your gift is now tax deductible.**

**Spirit of Justice and Community (Cafod)**

*Merciful God, give us the confidence to challenge injustice  
and to nurture the flame of justice until it burns brightly*

*May the Spirit of justice and community  
accompany us and light our way.*

*May this Spirit move us, heal us,  
Guide us and challenge us,  
Call us to action and to prayer.*

*May this passion for justice burn through us and in each one of us  
and may it warm the hearts of those around us,  
Encouraging hope and overcoming fear. Amen.*

## **WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT OUR PLANET:**

*Our Earth, Our Nature, Our Responsibility*

*In his message for Earth Day 2021, Pope Francis has reminded everyone of the importance of working together to protect our planet.*

**Video: Pope Francis Earth Day Message 2021**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svQho8C0XpQ>



*"When it comes to safeguarding creation, there is no time to waste — humanity either must live up to its responsibility or continue on a path of self-destruction".*

As the world continues to take measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, Pope Francis highlighted that the crisis has shown us, *"what happens when the world stops, pauses, even for a few months."*

He noted the pandemic's impact on nature and on climate change, which shows us all that global nature needs our lives on this planet.

*"It affects us all, albeit in multiple, diverse and unequivocal forms; and so it teaches us even more about what we need to do to create a just, equitable, environmentally safe planet,"* the Holy Father pointed out.

Furthermore, *"the COVID pandemic taught us this interdependence, this sharing of the planet,"* Pope Francis said, adding that both global catastrophes - Covid-19 and the climate emergency - show us that we are running out of time. *"We have the means, it is time to act, we are at the limit,"* he urged. (Vatican News 22 April 2021)

In a separate address to President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate, Pope Francis appealed to world leaders to *"act with courage, work with justice and always tell people the truth, so that people know how to protect themselves from the destruction of the planet, how to protect the planet from the destruction that many times we trigger."*

## OUR NEIGHBOURS IN REGIONAL WESTERN NSW celebrate...

What a wonderful sight! Water is now pouring into Lake Menindee after the gates were opened connecting it once again to the Darling-Baaka River.

With water in the lakes, invertebrates will hatch, fish will breed, birds will arrive and the lake will be once again teem with life. The local community and Barkandji will enjoy the lakes and tourists will arrive to revive the local economy.

(Nature Conservation Council)



Photo: Homelandings Media

## AND IN THE TORRES STRAIT .... MASIG ISLAND (350.org)

Yorke Island (traditionally known as Masig) is a coral island situated in the Eastern area of the central island group in the Torres Strait, 2.7km in length and 800m at its widest point.

*"This is a huge moment for us. We shared our story and our right to our island homes, on mainstream TV. If we build on this momentum by showing the government overwhelming public support for the #TorresStrait8, we could pressure them to take action on climate change and protect Zenadh Kes (the Torres Strait)!*

P.S. If you missed the 7.30 Report featuring #TorresStrait8 , you can watch it on ABC here.



## 16-24 May 2021

will celebrate the anniversary of Laudato Si', Pope Francis' world-changing encyclical that has inspired millions of Catholics around the world to take action against the ecological crisis and climate emergency.



## EAST TIMOR INDEPENDENCE DAY – 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY

East Timor Independence Day is celebrated on this day every year. This important day marks the independence won by Timor Leste from Indonesian rule in 2002. The day is also referred to as the Independence Restoration Day of Timor Leste.



## NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2021: 27 May–3 June

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) started as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993 (the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples) and was supported by Australia's major faith communities.

Reconciliation Australia's theme for 2021, *More than a word. Reconciliation takes action*, urges the reconciliation movement towards braver and more impactful action.

[Artwork: Jessica Johnson]

Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and importantly as a nation. At the heart of this journey are relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2021 marks twenty years of Reconciliation Australia and almost three decades of Australia's formal reconciliation process. (<https://nrw.reconciliation.org.au/>)