

Doors open for Francisca's family



Every day Francisca gets up and cooks breakfast, does the washing, and cleans the house. Before the tropical heat of Timor-Leste's rural south becomes too intense, she makes the two kilometre trek to school with her three children. In the afternoon, she walks them home. And then she helps her youngest, Amaro*, with his homework.

This may seem normal, even insignificant, to us here in Australia. The thing is, 35-year-old Francisca never learned to read or write.

Your prayers and support in the past have made it possible for Francisca, along with 53 other parents, to attend a three-month parent training program, equipping her to tutor her own son.

"This workshop has really inspired me," she says. "One trainer has helped me to write and read a lot. She showed me how to read the story and after the training she always gave me homework!"

Francisca teaches Amaro using reading, drawing and singing

activities. As a result, Amaro has the opportunity for the first time to learn through storytelling and creative play in his own home. He loves it when his mother sings songs with him and he proudly reads and writes his own name.

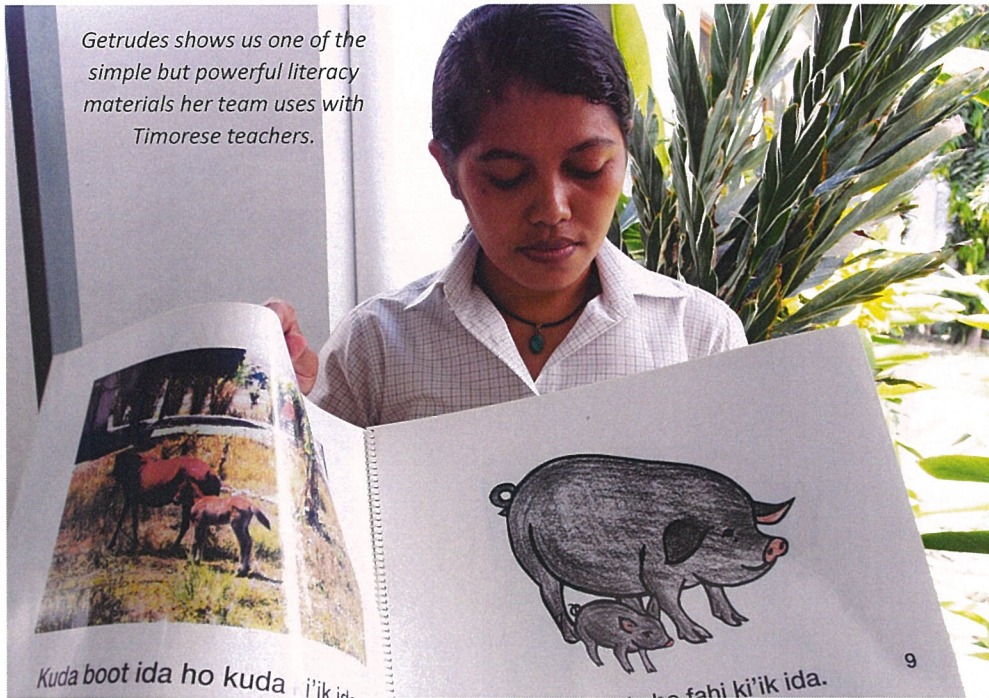
It is incredible to see how as an adult, Francisca has discovered the joy of reading and is now setting up her son to succeed in education.

The training has given Francisca a heartwarming confidence. With her newfound skills, she has volunteered to tutor other children from the neighbourhood. Studying with other students has lifted Amaro's rate of learning. In this Timorese village we are seeing how investing in one mother is having a ripple on effect to other families in the community.

Indeed, more parents like Francisca want to be part of this program – and you can open Doors of Mercy for these mothers and fathers and change the lives of more Timorese children like Amaro. Together we can make Mary MacKillop's vision of education for all a reality.

A letter from Getrudes

Getrudes shows us one of the simple but powerful literacy materials her team uses with Timorese teachers.



Having started as a Music Program volunteer back in 2009, Getrudes is now the Literacy Program Coordinator at our Timor-Leste office. In this newsletter, she wanted to tell you about the difference you are making in her country.

The work of MMI is special to me because it lets me help our own teachers in Timor-Leste. Our teachers are very limited in training and how to manage the classroom well.

We heard that teachers from the rural areas needed training, so we interviewed them and chose what kind of topics they wanted to learn. We prepared the syllabus and timetable; we also prepared the materials. After that, we ran the training for preschool and basic education teachers.

The thing that inspires me is working with my own people and sharing the knowledge that I have from others – I pass it to the teachers in Timor-Leste. I love to help in rural areas with education so they understand more and are more strategic in their school.

I see a positive impact that the teacher training program is having for the children in Timor-Leste. When I started in 2010 as a teacher trainer, I practised one month in school and I used all the methodology of reading stories and animation. The children made a lot of progress after they learned with me, in their testing at school. After we taught the children, we saw that many – including at least one or two that couldn't – can read the story.

If the teacher is animated and proactive, the children learn so much more. The first children that I was teaching have all been successful and have been getting good results.

My dream is that for the future, there is more education, especially in rural areas. Hopefully the education programs offered go more deeply into rural areas and train all the teachers so that all the children – in rural and urban areas get the same education. If that happens, in the future all the children will learn and be creative.

Thank you for your contributions and prayers to build up our own children and our own people in Timor-Leste. Through your support we can help build the teachers' capacity in Timor-Leste and a bright future for our country.

Getrudes

Pope Francis said “A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just”.

Dear Friends,

On December 8th last year, Pope Francis launched the Jubilee of Mercy by pushing open the normally closed doors of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. He asked that as people walk through it, they should take on the role of the Good Samaritan.

I hope you can see in the pages of this newsletter stories about a world being transformed one woman, one man, one child at a time through the support of those in Australia who feel called to open Doors of Mercy for their brothers and sisters in Timor-Leste and Peru. Doors that provide access to better educations, better healthcare, better futures.

The pages of this newsletter are littered with examples of people opening and walking through these Doors of Mercy. People like John Camilleri, who has been putting faith into action for decades. People like Francisca and her son, Amaro, for whom literacy is unlocking opportunities that previous generations have not known. People like Getrudes and Sisters Jenny and Charo who by their deeds are declaring Mercy in their own countries.

I thank you for being part of the legacy of Mary MacKillop and saying “yes” to the invitation to offer a new experience of Mercy to a very troubled world.

Warm regards,

K. Robertson

Kirsty Robertson



Transforming schools in the Amazon

Deep in the jungle, on the banks of the Amazon River, lies Iquitos. A truly remote metropolis, it is the world's largest city that cannot be reached by road. It is Peru's fifth most populated city with almost half a million people calling this place home and since March 2015, Iquitos is also home to two Peruvian Sisters of Saint Joseph, Jenny and Charo.

Their vision of quality education for the country's poorest – echoing Mary MacKillop's own passion – led them here to the impoverished neighbourhood of San Juan to serve at the local schools.

Poverty is rampant in Iquitos. A complex web of factors including the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest has pushed rural Peruvians into increasingly overcrowded urban centres like Iquitos. The population quadrupled in a period of less than 30 years, but many of the newcomers dwell in slums with limited access to even basic services. These poverty-stricken areas contrast painfully with the mansions in the more affluent parts of town.

Forgotten by the rest of the world, the poor of Iquitos desperately need help. Schools are one of the areas that have suffered the most. In the state of Loreto (of which Iquitos is the capital), only 7 percent of teachers passed Ministry of Education testing – the lowest rate in all of Peru. An annual student census confirms that Loreto is the worst state for education in the country. Yet education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and poor education means poor prospects for the children of Iquitos.

Since the Sisters began their ministry here, teachers have improved their teamwork and class preparation. The results are showing in the attitudes of their students, who are displaying great interest and participation, particularly in reading comprehension.

Sister Jenny is thankful for the "trust and interest" of Australian supporters in the work of improving education for kids in Iquitos: "Rest assured that the support that you give us is valuable and will impact the future, preparing citizens who are committed to their country and their community."

To find out more about MMI projects in Peru, visit our website: www.mmi.org.au.

Photo of Iquitos by inyucho, <https://flic.kr/p/cNUxC1>. Licence at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>.

A note about education in Peru

In the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), commissioned by the OECD, half a million students in 65 countries were assessed on maths, science and reading. Peru received the lowest score in all three categories.

In maths, for example, almost half of all students were evaluated as having below basic Level 1 standards, ie. they could not answer clearly defined and familiar questions where all necessary information was presented to them and instructions given on how to deduce the answer.

This is despite the fact that Peruvian students are amongst the happiest at school!

Peru also had one of the highest percentages of students in low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged schools.

Source: OECD Education GPS, 'Peru Student Performance' (2012).

An open door in Gippsland opens doors in Timor-Leste



Long-standing MMI supporter John Camilleri (left) meets MMI Timor-Leste Country Director, Alipio Baltazar.

It was a great privilege for our Timor-Leste Country Director, Alipio Baltazar, to meet long-standing supporter, John Camilleri, just before Christmas last year. Driving through stretches of lush greenery, past herds of cows, Alipio arrived at John's home in Victoria's Gippsland region.

Born in Malta, John has lived in this beautiful area ever since he and his parents came to Australia in the 1950s. The eldest of 12 siblings, he recalls that when they were building their house on the farm, the whole Camilleri mob lived in a shed on the property. Back then, they had only dirt floors. Over time they saved enough money to lay down concrete, but it was still extremely cold in the winter months because the wind blew through all the cracks in the walls!

Despite only completing two years of primary school, John became an engineer in the navy and a decorated war veteran, serving in Vietnam and Borneo. He married Dorothea, who had been a Mercy nun in her youth, and they started a family and established their own home on a farm John had bought. Together they adopted nine children and fostered seven more children. Although Dorothea passed away three years ago after a long battle with motor neuron disease, John preserves many wonderful memories of family life on their farm.

Passing through decades of photographs and memorabilia in their light-filled home, one can sense John and Dorothea's committed life of deep faith and service to their family, community, church and country. Indeed, John was nominated for the Australian of the Year Award in 2008.

In amongst these family treasures, Alipio spotted a small faded letter simply framed in black and gold, at least two decades old. It read:

A Tale of a Cow

A few years ago we received a donation from John and Dorothea Camilleri in the form of the proceeds from a calf they had sold. The donation was given to my sister, Sister Doreen Dagge RSJ, to pass on to a charity of her choice.

After donating the money from the sale of a cow with calf at hoof, this year John and Dorothea raised a herd of calves. When it came time for them to go to the sale yards, a neighbour transported them gratis, the agent let the buyers know that the sale was for East Timor, and the buyers added a bit more despite their own hard times.

In three years John and Dorothea and friends have helped to raise some thousands of dollars, helping feed the deep hunger for education which exists in Timor.

Sr Therese Dagge rsj

Sr Therese made those comments at the very start of the Camilleris' interest in and commitment to the work of the Sisters of St Joseph in Timor-Leste. Now, 20 odd years later, John remains a staunch advocate for Timorese education.

Alipio had the honour of saying a personal "obrigado" (thank you) on behalf of his people for all of John's years of friendship. In this Jubilee of Mercy it was humbling to see how John has been opening Doors of Mercy to the Timorese for many years, long before he opened his front door late last year to warmly greet his Timorese visitor. This dedicated man of faith continues to be a bright source of hope for those we serve in Timor-Leste.

Thank you, Sr Irene!

We said goodbye to Sr Irene Macinante, who retired in December after over 20 years developing literacy resources for the Timorese people.

She is pictured here with translator Luisa Marques (centre) and Sr Rosita, both of whom partnered with Sr Irene in this important work. We thank Sr Irene for her faithful service and priceless contribution to education in Timor-Leste. We will miss her company in our North Sydney office!



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