

Let anyone with ears listen.

I wonder how many of us feel that we can really 'live-the-Gospel' in this modern-day world? . . . That we can be sowers of seeds? . . . That we can find good soil to bring forth grain a hundredfold?

During my visit to Timor last month, I felt blessed living on the 'front lines' with Jesuits for ten days; eating, drinking, talking . . . bathing every day in cold water with a bucket and pail . . .

But the few days Railaco experience was more like 'living-the-Gospel'. I rode with Fr Bong to the medical clinics in remote communities; . . . I witnessed the kids enjoying a nutritious meal; . . . and was fairly blown-away by the amazing development of the secondary school children since my previous visit, all formed in the Ignatian tradition to believe that their education is not just about learning, but being 'men and women for others'.

Our sister parish relationship with Railaco provides all of us with such an opportunity to 'live-the-Gospel'; to know better that the parables we're all familiar with are not just stories; but outlines of opportunities to guide us better in ways to live-out our faith.

In the ten days, I was up there on this trip, I was not sowing seeds. . . I was part of a 'harvest'.

Back in 2004, Sue Crabbe, Matt Gordon and a couple of other Canice parishioners were the modern-day 'sowers of seed'. They travelled to East Timor – 'reaching-out to the people in this newly independent but still struggling, neighbour country just north of Darwin.

The situation was desperate; the country was just emerging from years of guerrilla warfare, and a traumatised people were still recovering from decades of living under oppressive Indonesian occupation.

I can still hear Sue Crabbe talking of her experience from back then:

“One word that we used endlessly in our discussions was ‘hope’, she said. People need hope. People need something better in their lives to offer their children”.

“And we wanted to offer them as much as we could by offering them ‘education’.

We identified education in three ways; . . . straight academic education, hygiene and nutrition.”

And hence the St Canice / Railaco Children’s Feeding Program, Mobile Medical Clinic and Secondary School, were launched. Over the years, you’ve heard many times of the progress, the ‘harvest’ from these early ‘sowers of seeds’.

Another important aspect of this sister parish relationship, and one that Fr Chris and others frequently remind me is, “whatever we do to support Railaco, has to ‘enrich the life of our parish’”.

For years, I’ve simply failed to see this pastoral dimension. How does raising money for Railaco enrich us here at St Canice’s?

As we nourish our parish, we colour Timor's future!" Our accompaniment allows Railaco's marginalised families to grow in community, opportunity and hope. Our impact extends far beyond a simple nutritious meal, a medical check-up, and a class in school; we are allowing Railaco villagers to lead better lives now and for generations in the future.

Our ongoing involvement keeps us aware; it reminds us of our privilege; and gives us the opportunity to gain in a spiritual way. Our life is enriched by the work that is done there!

This year, the enrolment of students at NOSSEF, the Railaco Secondary School totals 300.

Twelve years ago, St Canice parishioners built a humble 2-room besser-block classroom to launch this Secondary School - with children walking up to two hours a day to come to classes! Today, we are very proud of the academic achievement demonstrated in the results of last year's Year 12 graduating students – All sixty-seven passed the national exams, and nearly half of them went on to higher education! This is an amazing achievement.

It talks to the sustainability of our shared endeavours to assist the poorest of the poor to do something not only for their own and their families' futures, but for the nation.

It's very easy to be personal about sharing the story of the Railaco Children's Feeding Program. The manager of the program, the ever-smiling Christina, is the mother of seven and grandmother of one, has been managing the program since 2005. Two of her children come to NOSSEF the Railaco Secondary School.

Christina and her assistant work every day preparing the nutritious meal, before climbing aboard the battered old 4WD to bounce over mountainous roads to reach the remote communities.

On the day that I trailed along, I enjoyed interacting with the many pre-school children who sang songs for us before being served their one meal of the day. And with an eye on nutrition, always with milk and an egg. On this day, there was one family of seven, and another with five children.

Through his mobile medical clinics, Fr Bong, a Filipino doctor and Jesuit priest, provides preventative medical services for poor people in nine remote communities who live outside the reach of local government services.

Patients of all ages, many of them mothers with newborns cradled in their arms, walk for miles to see the doctor. Two trained local assistants accompany 'Bong' in his battered 4WD to receive the patients, and dispense medications from the 'mobile pharmacy' in the back.

There were more than 7,000 consultations last year alone. Those who can afford it pay twenty-five cents to see the doctor. This contributes less than \$1,000 in a year to the expense of the mobile clinics. The balance of the clinics budget, \$45,000, is part of the overall financial commitment to Railaco Mission by the people of St Canice's.

On this last trip, I also set about finding answers to other questions that impact Australians attitudes towards East Timor today.

When chatting with potential donors, I'm often asked 'Why East Timor? Don't we have enough needy people here at home to worry about?'; and 'What is life really like up there in the villages?'

While living day-to-day with the Jesuits, answers to these and other questions evolved. My goal for the trip was primarily to gather new information about the kids, the school, and the mothers whom we help, and then to make a video to share with you.

We'll still get you that new video, but as the days rolled on, I became conscious of a burning inner desire to share more of what I was learning.

I was hoping that with a little more awareness, more of us here at St Canice's might be motivated to 'climb on board', to become 'sowers of seed', and become actively involved in raising funds to enable those on the front lines, to continue with their service to the poor.

It may be a little 'tongue in cheek', but I labeled my report: 'The First Letter of Michael to the Caniceians'. We have a copy for you as you leave the church today.

Chapter 9 on the 'report' invites you to consider becoming a Railaco 'Ambassador'. I have tried to outline several things that you can take your time to digest, and perhaps discuss with your friends. I would really appreciate assistance to respond to the need that I have experienced first-hand up there in Timor.

Please take home a small tais gift as you leave the church too. Tais is a form of traditional weaving and an essential part of East Timor's cultural heritage. Tais weavings are used as a sign of respect and appreciation towards guests.

It's a privilege to see how the East Timorese appreciate our recognition from afar. Your generosity greatly impacts on their lives. It enables them to learn; to do something not only for their own future but for the future of their families; and for the nation.

Maintaining our level of financial support towards the expenses of the Railaco Jesuit Mission is an ongoing challenge.

Each one of us needs to think about our call to 'live-the-gospel'; . . . to become a 'sower of seeds'; . . . to cultivate new fertile grounds, by sharing the word amongst friends and colleagues, encouraging them to take an interest in supporting the works of the Railaco Mission.

On the last weekend in July, we celebrate the Feast Day of St Ignatius. This is also the weekend that you'll have the chance to give. There will be a Special Leaving Collection after each of the Masses for you to show your support.

Also on that Sunday, students from Sydney's Jesuit Colleges, who have recently returned from 'immersion' experiences in Railaco will be at all three Masses to share briefly of their experiences.

Dare I suggest 'shouting' a few extra coffees or beers for the people of Railaco between now and then? In the tais gift purse there's an envelope. Place the few notes or coins that you save in the envelope, and bring it (or card details) along and place in the Leaving Collections at the St Ignatius Day Masses. We'll send your gift on to Railaco.

If you would like to get more involved in this important outreach, please get in touch with me personally, or tell Elizabeth or Lynelle in the parish office. I will get back to you.

Thank you.