

The Catechists of RAILACO Parish:

The three Bishops of Timor-Leste had been to Rome for their meeting with Pope Francis. This is what had been reported by Radio Vatican:

The Bishops mentioned "Formation" as the biggest challenge for the 3 Dioceses of East Timor. "When we say that 97% of the population is Catholic, we talk of the baptised but their knowledge of the Faith is far away. It is partly a result of the civil conflict. At that time many people got themselves baptised. The Church at that time had neither the time nor the money in order to educate them in the faith. Even today, the structures for the formation of Clerics and Catechists is very limited. For that we require the help of Churches of other lands. Till today we were assisted mainly by the Church in Portugal and this year also the Church in Brazil. However, 'Formation' remains the biggest concern on all levels.

I go back to December 2012, when Fr. Joseph Phuong, S.J., the Parish Priest of Railaco had decided to take the catechists of the 12 Mass Centres for An exposure trip to Suai. One afternoon we went to Suai Loro, which is not very far from the Jesuit Centre there. It was something special for me to see all those traditional houses there. Fr. Phuong is standing with some of the village elders.



We then saw these women and girls who were involved in a traditional dance, which was meant to last a total of 5 days. The reason was to appease the spirits because a branch of the tree near the Community House had fallen.



It is important to realise that although the official figures state that the country of Timor-Leste is 97% Catholic, more than 60% had registered themselves as Catholic during the Indonesian rule. At this time It was then essential that everyone had to state the religion they belonged to. These people who registered themselves as Catholics had names associated to Catholics, but were deeply attached to all the traditional customs.



Fr. Phuong decided to go, the next evening, to bless the community house. It was his way of showing solidarity with the community.

In our discussions we had realised that pastoral work in Timor-Leste was something that we could not overlook. I



personally feel that we need very much to understand the beliefs of the people. We should not try to replace everything with 100% Roman Liturgical practices!.

Railaco has 12 Mass Centres to which Fr. Phuong, Fr. Bong and Fr. Bert go regularly. On weekends they are assisted by Fr. Quyen, Fr. Ura and Fr. Weyms who take turns going there. It is only when one has accompanied



them, and gone with them to these Mass Centres, that one realises the effort needed to go in spite of one's zeal. The roads are not the very best, often steep and difficult to navigate especially soon after a rain! Then suddenly you may have a road block like this fallen tree!



At these 12 Mass Centres, to which the faithful come walking over long mountainous roads, the Parish Priest has very limited contact with the people. It is here where the local catechist and some other parish helpers keep the community united in their practice of the faith. Fr. Phuong and his predecessors have done their bit to strengthen them.

During and after the visit to Suai we had been speaking about what else we needed to do for the Catechists and Parish helpers. Thanks to some generous support of some donors, Fr. Phuong organised a training program for some Catechists and Parish Helpers in Dili.

Let Fr. Phuong take over now and explain what he did:

"The main reason for this program was to help promote the faith of our parishioners. Not only are our faithful poor materially but also in the faith which they had received when they were baptized.

Let me relate an incident which had occurred just two years ago when I was appointed the Parish Priest of this Quasi-parish of Railaco on the mountains. I was setting in motion a plan to continue the faith formation of the faithful of these Mass Centres. At one of the first meetings when I had explained a little about our faith, they had understood and believed. At the next time when I had continued teaching them I posed one question to them: "Do you believe there is a God?" This question I posed to them individually i.e. to a child, a young boy and a young girl, male and female adults and even the catechist. I got the response: "Of course we believe!"

The next set of questions I posed: "Do you see him?"... the answer "NO". "Do you touch him?" ..."no".....and finally: "Is there God?". They quickly gave the answer: "NO".



In the photograph above, you see one of the Chapels at one of the Mass Centres. Way up on the mountains. The people have a lot to do for their daily living: fetching water for their daily needs,

finding ways and means, apart for limited agriculture, for daily sustenance. The Catechists too are caught up in this daily routine.

They did not have any real faith formation. They know to recite prayers like the “Our Father”, the “Hail Mary” but are not able to fully explain them. They can tell you about the “Ten Commandments” and the “Seven Sacraments” but cannot fully explain their meaning.

We cannot blame them as we have not given them the formation.

Thanks to some donations received I had the courage to plan a 6 week “Catechist Training Program” for 22 Catechists/Parish Helpers of the Railaco quasi-parish. We are grateful to the Canossian Sisters for making the facilities available at their Centre in Balide, Dili, for this program. The Coordinator of

this program was Sr. Esmeralda Piedade Araújo, FCdC.



In this photograph taken at the Canossian Centre we see Fr. Phuong, Sr. Esmeralda and the Catechists/Parish helpers. The participants feel that they have really benefitted from this 6 week program.

It had been made possible for the participants to go back on the week ends to their families. We give below some details of all the participants:

CHAPEL	NO	FULL NAME	SEX	NOTE
Cocoa	1	Erminda Amaral	Female	Single, 18 yrs, farmer
	2	Fernanda Babo	F	Single, 25 yrs, farmer
Craic	3	Albina da Cruz Soares	F	Single, 25 yrs, farmer
Caitarahei	4	Maria Madalena Fatima Soares	F	Single, 21 yrs, student
	5	Angela Salsinha Soares	F	Single, 19 yrs, Engl. study, farmer
	6	Ermelinda dos Santos Soares	F	Single, 25 yrs, farmer
Fatuquero	7	Candida Soares Madeira	F	Single, 30 yrs, 1 adopted son
	8	Rosantina Sequeira	F	Single, 26 yrs, farmer
Leorema	9	Joaquina da Luz	F	Married, 27yrs , 2 children, farmer
Leten	10	Crispin Simoes de Jesus	Male	Married, 23yrs, 1 daughter, farm.
	11	Americo de Fatima	M	Married, 39yrs, 8 children, farmer
Matata	12	Fernanda Salsinha	F	Married, 23yrs, 1 son, farmer
	13	Lazaro Martins	M	Single, 23 yrs, computer student
	14	Juliana Neno	F	Single, 19 yrs, student
Samalete	15	Angelica de Fatima	F	Married, 52yrs, 8 children and 7 grandchildren, farmer
	16	Alice Carvalho Piedade	F	Single, 20 yrs, high school student
	17	Izaura de Fatima Piedade	F	Single, 16 yrs, pre-high school student
Sentro	18	Carlos Pereira	M	Married, 40 yrs, 3 children, farm.
	19	Domingas Rosa Soares	F	Married, 40 yrs, 7 children, farm.
Tocoluli	20	Armanda Goncalves Soares	F	Married, 43 yrs, 6 children, 3 grandchildren, farmer
	21	Olandina de Sousa Soares	F	Single, 25 yrs, farmer
	22	Joao de Deus Lobato	M	Married, 53 yrs, 8 children, farm.

Details of the Expenses for 22 persons:

1. Lodging, classroom use and food 22 x \$ 80	=	\$ 1,760
2. New Testament, Creed, Song book + other material 22 x \$ 11	=	\$ 242
3. Transport 22 x 20	=	\$ 440
4. Teacher subsidies	=	\$ 800
5. Outing to Cristo Rey on conclusion	=	\$ 67
Total		<u>\$ 3,309</u>

The Parish contribution was \$ 309 and the rest was from donations sent by you.

After this training program, these catechists/parish helpers will bring the children of their sub-villages together. They will be taught the catechism and will be accompanied in their faith. They will also be gathering the parents for a reading and reflection on the Gospel every week.

I wish to thank all of you who supported this very important program

**May the promise of Easter
fill us all with renewed
faith, hope and joy—**

20th April, 2014
Dili, East Timor.

Fr. Joseph Nguyen Than Phuong, S.J.
Parish Priest of Railaco Quasi Parish.



In the first photograph above you see Br. Tha who went regularly every evening to teach the catechists about Bible-sharing. In the other two photographs we see the participants at the outing to Cristo Rey.



This is a view of Cristo Rey from the beach. The place where the catechists had their get-together is on the right hand side.

The training of Catechists is something very special and needs to be supported.

I wish you the very special blessings of the Risen Lord.

- Noel Oliver -