

# Marist Mission Newsletter

A publication of Marist Mission Centre Australia

Supporting the missions of the new millennium and development in Asia-Pacific

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## Thumbs up

Project partners of the Marist Mission Centre report back on major successes in their programs throughout Asia-Pacific. Most projects focus on the needs of underprivileged youth in these countries.

1. Young Marists from the Pacific and the Philippines form the core of “The Other Half” experience in Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines [*“Young Marists’ Other Half”*, pp 2-3]. 2. Disabled young women have personal study desks at YODIFEE’s new residence, Cambodia. [*“The Blessing of Villa Maria”*, pp 4-5]. 3. Marist TOH-ers, **Toma Lakai SM** and **Jean Vianney Barang SM**, at YODIFEE farm, Battambang, Cambodia. 4. Young Karen refugees, **Mary** and **Eray**, prepare for a nursing career at Maera Moo Refugee Camp, Thai-Burma border. 5. Newly-ordained African Marists, **Fr Emile Kouma SM** [left] and **Fr Cyr Avaligbe SM** [right] with District Superior, **Fr Damien Diouf SM**. The ordinations took place in Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines where the young Marists are completing their formation program.



# Up front

## 'Mud, sweat and gears'

The subtitle for this year's 'Cycling for Seminarians' is something of a misnomer. Riding a bike in drought times is hardly a muddy experience.

As this newsletter goes to press I am in the midst of the Ride which you have again supported so generously. Our total is moving towards its customary \$50,000 mark. Thank you on behalf of our seminarians in Africa, the Philippines, Oceania and South America who benefit from your gifts.



I have been riding in and around towns in NSW, Victoria and South Australia and may soon add Queensland to the list. Your letters with their travel tips, health advice and other wisdom for this ageing Director are encouraging, often amusing and always appreciated. Thank you!

## Strategic planning

It sounds fancy but simply means looking ahead and planning how best the work of MMC can be done in coming years. This is an important part of our agenda in these coming months.

Our planning will take the values we treasure as Marists and the resources with which we are blessed — and plan how best these can come together to assist our Marist missions and to promote effective development assistance in Asia-Pacific.

Please pray that MMC's future will be blessed with fidelity to our best traditions and an openness to new ways of serving those in need.

## Christmas thanks

Our Marist missionaries in the Philippines and Oceania have once again flooded the office with expressions of gratitude following the Christmas cash gifts we sent in December. Always they ask me to pass on their sincere thanks to you, our supporters, and to the staff and volunteers of MMC.

In sending the Christmas gifts we make it clear to the local Marist superiors that they are for the personal use of the individual Marist missionaries.

Some confreres use it to buy some new gear for their computer, parish plant or school. One man was reported to have turned up at a Christmas celebration in his first set of new clothes in many years!

I thank you on behalf of my missionary confreres in whose prayers you and all Marist benefactors are remembered daily throughout the world.

May our Father carry us gently through the weeks and times ahead ...

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'Jean Vianney Barang SM'.

Masses were offered by Fr Ron in recent months for the following deceased Marists and MMC benefactors in addition to victims of terrorism and disasters...

Pie Aye, Clare Cashman, Alice Coleman, Elizabeth Delaney, Bernard Demee, Mollie Fitzgerald, Paula Hancock, Frank Kneipp, Gregory Knight, Bishop Gerard Loft SM, Sheila Mulhearn, Mary Pollock, John Skehan, Molly Stewart, Cynthia Topley, Constance Tulloch, Jack Twomey, Robert Vince, Alfred Wilson, Billie Woodland, Charles Zarb.



The late **Bishop Gerard Loft SM**, New Zealand-born Marist missionary and former bishop of Auki, Solomon Islands.

# Young Marists' Other Half

'The Other Half' exposure experience [Dec 2006-Jan 2007] was especially geared for four young Marists from the Pacific and the Philippines. One of them, Vanuatu-born sixth year seminarian, **Jean Vianney Barang SM**, shares memories of his journey...

The TOH experience is about meeting the people on the other side of our world to my own world. TOH stands for 'The Other Half.' For me this journey is not a tourist tour but an experience, to see, feel and ask questions why this is like this or like that in each situation that I encountered.

## Listening

The first thing that I wanted to achieve was to share my own half and to listen to his/her half. One goal I set for myself was to have the confidence to reach out to people no matter what situation I happened to meet them in.

## HIV kids in Thailand

The first touching moment for me was when I visited the HIV/AIDS kids at Sarnelli Mission, N. E. Thailand. They came to me, hugged me, smiled and laughed with me. I felt sad to see them in their situation and how the little ones had been rejected or lived apart from society. I felt grateful also for the very first time to be tenderly caring to others and to be free to love those who long for tenderness, care and concern.

## Christmas with refugees

Being in a refugee camp was a blessing to share the birthday of our Lord with the refugee peoples. I was grateful to have this time of Christmas at Maera Moo Camp with these young Karens from Burma living as refugees in the middle of the mountains of the Thai-Burma border. I was moved how they are so committed to their faith and belief. Visiting and staying with the young it was for me an opportunity

to reach out physically and to give hope to them.

I was able to experience their half: their struggles, their ways of living. I was deeply moved also about how they were escaping from their homeland in Burma to search for better education in a refugee camp. Whatever they get from the camp in terms of education this is what they treasure as their qualification in life. They long for better education but they cannot afford it.

### Disabled youth of Cambodia

When I visited the disabled youth in Cambodia at the YODIFEE project I felt excited to be and share with another group of people who are not physically well. I could see the life in them; the joy of having visitors coming to them. But the worst and sad thing is how sickness such as polio makes them suffer more. It is sad to hear a new young friend say that he is in pain everyday because his physical condition is getting worse. It made me more grateful for my own health.

The group too had the opportunity to study. Some of them working with computers and their little workshop.

### Toul Sleng Genocide Museum

Being in this place, along with the Killing Fields, was most painful for me. The inhumanity and evil of the acts carried out here hit home. To hear the story, to walk amongst the mass graves, to see the clothes on the ground of those who were tortured... but it doesn't stop there. The children of that generation were not vaccinated against polio and now suffer from it. Others have become disabled from land mines which took away legs and arms.

### Marists in the Philippines

Ending the TOH in the Philippines was great for me. The 'other half' here were my Marist confreres of the Philippines Mission District. The Marist family was so welcoming of us. It was a great opportunity to visit them and the places of their pastoral

outreach in prisons, mental hospitals and also teaching in a school. The Marist spirit was so alive.

My thoughts went to the pioneer missions of the Bugey Mountains in France when Fr Aliko Langi took us to see and experience his scattered flock in the mountains of Timanan. It inspired me to be a missionary too. Now it is my turn, my half to be available to mission to their half. I felt the spirit of community and spirit of Mary in each of them, Fathers Brothers, Sisters and Laity.

### Appreciation

I thank the wonderful people of Australia who wholeheartedly and freely support the work of the Marist Mission Centre. Their generosity enables the likes of me to experience our brothers and sisters from the other half of the world. I am grateful to the MMC Director, Fr Ron Nissen, for his leadership and management during this journey. It was a wonderful experience reaching out to the 'other half' in South East Asia.

*The other Marists on TOH 2006-07 were Fr Pio Fong SM [Fiji], Fr Anggong Ingente SM [Philippines] and Br Toma'akino Lakai SM [Tonga]. They were accompanied by Clement Cheung [Sydney] and, in Thailand and Cambodia by YODIFEE members, Peter Ouch, Chek Ban and Philip Ann.*



**1. Jean Vianney Barang** with HIV/AIDS kids, Sarnelli Mission, Nongkhai. **2.** TOH-ers and Karen youngsters at the IDP Hostel, Mae La Refugee Camp, Thailand. **3.** School ministry at Digos, Philippines. **4. Toma Lakai** and other 'Happy Little Vegemites', MMC Hostel, Maera Moo Camp, Thai-Burma border. **5.** En route to Kaw Thaug, Burma. **6. Fr Pio Fong SM** in pre-Christmas ministry at Maera Moo. **7. Clement Cheung** at Digos gaol.



# The blessing of Villa Maria

Youth with Disabilities Foundation for Education and Employment was established in 2001 with MMC support to cater for the needs of physically handicapped young people in Cambodia. In June 2006 the YODIFEE community moved into its new residence, 'Villa Maria', at Tak-mao on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. MMC was able to fund the building

through bequests and regular donor support. 'Villa Maria' was opened and blessed on Dec 14, 2006, by Phnom Penh's Catholic archbishop, **Most Rev Emile Destombes MEP**. MMC's Fr Ron Nissen SM was among the invited guests who included the staff and students of Lavalla School, Tak-mao. MMC assisted Lavalla's foundation in 1998-99.



1. Australian Marist Brothers, **Darryl Slater** and **Terry Heinrich** [seated top left] and their Lavalla students and staff were among the special guests at the 'Villa Maria' blessing. 2. **Archbishop Destombes** and YODIFEE Director, **Peter Ouch**. 3 & 4. Lavalla visitors at YODIFEE's craft shop and the main gate of 'Villa Maria'. Many of YODIFEE's residents are graduates from Lavalla School. 5 & 6. Family gatherings and luncheon for all followed the blessing ceremony. 7. At another ceremony — in Thailand some weeks later — YODIFEE student and computer instructor, **Chek Ban**, accepts a laptop computer from **Fr Ron Nissen SM** as first prize for MMC's 2006 English competition. Thirty-one students from YODIFEE and MMC's Karen projects took place in the competition which assessed conversational skills of participants.





1. These YODIFEE young women trained in tailoring are now earning income. 2. YODIFEE graduate, **Sopoal**, teaches electronic skills to trainee, **Bunly**, at the project shop. 3. **Chek Ban** teaches computer skills to YODIFEE students. 4. English classes at YODIFEE are conducted by Director, **Peter Ouch**. All YODIFEE teachers and students have some form of physical disability.



5. YODIFEE trainees currently studying at the Jesuit Service Centre, Phnom Penh. 6. The YODIFEE mechanical workshop at Takmao. 7. **Sokheng** is learning wood crafting skills. 8, 9 & 10. At YODIFEE developmental farm, Battambang Province: disabled trainee, banana grove, expanded pig breeding facilities.



# The world of MMC

Grateful project partners often send reports and photos of how MMC funding has helped them. The photos aren't always in focus but the projects are on target...

**1.** Prize-giving at the small MMC-funded jungle school in India providing education for Burmese refugees. **2 & 3.** Fr David Galvin SM sends photos of parishioners from Makira, Solomon Islands. MMC has long supported the Marist missions of the Pacific. **4.** MMC continues to support the new Marist Mission at Ranong, Thailand, where the team led by Fr John Larsen SM works with Burmese migrant workers. **5, 6 & 7.** Fr Jerome Thari reports new hope for farmers in Loikaw, Myanmar, thanks to this artesian water and irrigation project made possible by MMC. **8 & 9.** MMC funds enabled the diversion of a river threatening seminary property in Honiara, Solomon Islands. **10.** Marist missionary, Fr Lolecio Tupa SM [left] with poor villagers from Mato Grosso, Brazil. **11.** Fr Mike Shea CSSR with one of his HIV/AIDS charges at Nongkhai, Thailand. MMC supports the rural AIDS outreach program of Sarnelli House. **12.** MMC support enabled Australian Marist, Fr Andrew Murray SM, to participate in the Pacific Regional Interreligious Colloquium on 'Indigenous Cultural and Religious Concepts of Peace and Good Governance' in Samoa, Dec 2005.



## Case studies

Reports from project partners often include case studies showing how MMC funds have assisted individuals and families.

In rural Bangladesh MMC supports a local NGO, the **Human Development Program**, in two projects. At the 'Fr Tonino Health Centre', My-mensingh, MMC funds provide medical equipment and health training while at nearby Sakhipur, an MMC/HDP Vocational Training Program addresses the skills development needs of local youth.

Following are excerpts from a recent report from HDP Director, **Robert Simon Gomes**...

### Health Care Program



**Alpana Barmon** has two small children. Her husband is a poor wood worker and can earn hardly enough for two simple meals for his family each day. As a family they have known little about food, nutrition and health care. They were often malnourished and sick.

At the 'Fr Tonino Health Centre' Alpana has received training in nutrition and basic health care and has started her own vegetable garden.

The family now eats good, simple food and the children and Alpana have gained weight. They now sell surplus vegetables to neighbours to augment their income thanks to MMC help.



**Nayan Sarker** (5) developed serious night blindness. His father is a very poor farm labourer and his mother a housewife. They could not afford nutritious food for their five children. The staff of MMC-supported 'Father Tonino Health Centre' have provided a ten-day nutrition and eye care program for Nayan, teaching his mother at the same time how to prepare nutritious foods. After three months the boy is fully recovered.

### Youth Vocational Training Program



The family of **Adnan Yusuf** (18) was too poor to keep him in secondary school. He was forced to work with his illiterate farm-worker father to earn money for basic food for the family. Sometimes daily work was not available. He has four dependent siblings and a grandmother to feed daily.

HDP's vocational training program, funded by MMC, has provided electrical/mechanical skills for Adnan who is an intelligent lad. He now has a reputation as a competent tradesman in house wiring, electrical and motor repairs and supports his family with a much increased income. The family now eat and dress well and have earned a high level of community respect.



**Nazma Begum** (19) is the daughter of a poor shopkeeper who could not afford to send her to school or training centre. After selection in HDP's vocational training program Nazma was found to be amongst the most clever in her class and completed a tailoring course well ahead of time.

With HDP/MMC credit scheme support Nazma now has her own sewing machine and has set up a small tailoring shop, a dream come true.



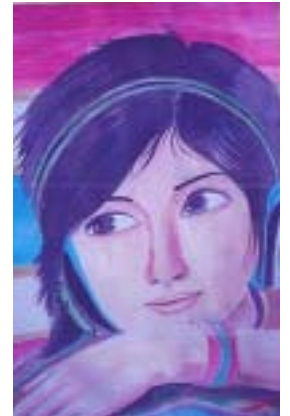
**Mizanur Rahman** (17) left school at the end of Grade Five. His poor family lived from hand to mouth on their father's small wage.

HDP's vocational training program has provided Mizanur with carpentry training. He has never missed a training class and often stays after regular hours.

Within six months Mizanur has become one of the most promising furniture makers in his district and hopes soon to set up his own workshop. He is happy to be able to support his family through regular income.

# Scholarship Art

Providing a back page with a difference are these paintings sent by students from MMC Hostel, Maera Moo Refugee Camp, Thai-Burma border. MMC funds provide training and material resources for a scholarship program for Karen and Cambodian youth. Art is among the range of study areas chosen by the youngsters. Pictured below is **Saw Daniel** [top left] with his class at the Hostel. Daniel often sends pieces of art from the students who range from primary to post secondary school. Other subjects for the MMC Scholarship Program include English language, computer skills, tailoring and music [guitar and keyboard]. Students prepare their own budgets and develop a schedule to report on their developing skills.



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MMC is proudly a member of the Australian Council for International Development and signatory to its Code of Conduct.

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