

# Marist Mission Newsletter

in the New Millennium

A publication of Marist Mission Centre, Australia

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## Helping Hands

Marist Mission Centre continues a tradition of help for handicapped people in developing countries.



*Above:* "Karen Christmas", a gift to MMC from Saw Michael, Mae La refugee camp, Thailand [p.2]. *Left:* Five-year old **Tanvir** has cerebral palsy. He is visited by **Sr Susan SMSM** [at right] in Dhaka City, Bangladesh [pp. 3-6, 'Help for the handicapped']. *Below:* Students from MMC-supported Lavalla graduates' employment hostel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia [pp. 3-6, 'Help for the handicapped'].



# Up front

## Christmas and MMC

I know there will be many prayers for MMC supporters this Christmas. There always are.

This is especially true of our missionaries honouring the Marist tradition of praying for benefactors daily.

The most constant message I receive from those we assist in developing countries is *“Please thank the friends of MMC who help us and tell them they are often in our prayers.”*

## Refugees at Christmas

Last year I enjoyed the remarkable experience of Christmas in Maera Moo refugee camp, Thailand. Deep in the jungles of the Thai-Burma border the people of Maera Moo had never had Mass at Christmas.

Along with Australian youngsters experiencing how “the other half” lives I reflected on the great gift of freedom denied to so many in our own times.

## Office closed

MMC office will be closed for three weeks over the Christmas—New Year period.

We’ll do our best to send off acknowledgments of all gifts received before Christmas. However there are bound to be some late donations that will be carried over to the New Year.

I know you will be understanding of any delays of receipts at this time.

## “Designated gifts”

I have mentioned a number of times this year that we are unable to promise swift transfer of gifts sent to MMC for particular missionaries. I cannot commit our tiny staff to giving this priority over our main work of Marist missionary and project support.

*Below:* 18-yr old **Saw Michael** enjoys MMC support for his secondary education. During the “TOH 2002” visit to Mae La refugee camp, Thailand, he presented MMC with his painting “Karen Christmas”. Michael is a member of Holy Family Catholic



For those MMC friends who wish us to act again on your behalf before Christmas I advise that gifts received after early December will not be forwarded until February.

It’s worth mentioning again that MMC cannot issue tax-deductible receipts for gifts intended for church use. In 2004 we will need written assurances from donees concerning the use of gifts in order to be able to give tax receipts to donors.

## Six years on

In 1998 my predecessor, Sr Vivienne Goldstein SM, remarked that *“MMC is truly a Marist work”*. I am very much aware now how true this is as our projects reach out to those on the margins and most easily overlooked.

Working at MMC has been such a privilege because of this.

As this newsletter goes to press I draw to the end of a six-year appointment and await news of 2004. If this means further ministry at MMC it shall be a continuing honour.

May our Father carry us gently through the weeks...

## What you’re saying

Some of the many comments from MMC’s family of friends and supporters...

### ...with your gifts

*“Sorry this is late but it was lost in the ‘to do’ pile.”* J. & P. C., Peregian Beach Qld. • *“I enclose a donation... for all those who devote their lives to those less able to help themselves.”* J.A., Queenscliff, NSW. • *“I raised \$100 from selling bunches of flowers from my back garden. I am retired and will soon turn 82.”* S.Z., Sydney. • *“I had increased payments for some work hence the donation. The newsletters are a great testimony to the excellent, even extraordinary, work MMC is doing.”* T.R., Wembley, WA. • *“Please find my cheque... to be used for overseas aid. I wish to express my admiration for all the work you are doing and wish you all the best.”* M.W., Longueville, NSW.

### ...about the newsletter

*“We received your newsletter today—understated and informative. We appreciate this interesting newsletter which also has the benefit of not going to the expense and gloss of some other charities.”* D, G. & L. G., Concord, NSW. • *“Great to receive the Spring newsletter... more meaningful to read after my visit to MMC.”* Fr S. H., Fiji. • *“Your newsletter always touches my heart. The work the missionaries are doing amongst the ‘new untouchables’ particularly in Cambodia, is truly ‘awesome’. May God continue to bless this work.”* J.H., East St Kilda, Vic. • *“Thank you for the latest newsy newsletter. I enclose a cheque towards whatever MMC project you wish.”* D.C., Killara, NSW. • *“We enjoy reading of the work the Marists are doing in so many countries north of Australia.. It must be a joy for you to see the progress being made there.”* B. &

# Help for the handicapped

MMC has a long history of caring for the handicapped. In recent years our focus has been on three developing countries of South-East and South Asia: Thailand, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

This photo story traces the past five years of Marist mission care for handicapped persons in these countries.

## Thailand

For over ten years Thailand has been host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from the various ethnic groups of Burma. In 1998 MMC was asked to address the needs of a special group of Karen farmers from the refugee camps of Mae La and Huay Kalok on the Thai-Burma border.

The violence of the Burmese military had left many without limbs or vision through gunfire and landmines.

A small project was prepared to enable these men to earn a livelihood by tilling rented fields with farm tools designed to meet their disabilities.

## HIV/AIDS

For most people living with HIV/AIDS their final days bring severe disability. MMC has supported a number of projects assisting such persons in Thailand.

American Redemptorist missionary, Fr Joe Maier, acknowledges MMC as his earliest support in establishing the now-famous Mercy Centre in Bangkok's Klong Toey "slaughterhouse" slums.



**Scenes from 1998. Top:** The oldest and youngest disabled persons in Mae La refugee camp, Thailand. A blind man stands with dignity by a legless toddler, both victims of Burmese military landmines. **Above:** Physically-disabled farmers from Huay Kalok refugee camp. In March 1998 the camp was torched in a midnight raid by SLORC troops and has since been relocated. **Right:** Redemptorist missionary, Fr Joe Maier, cares for a woman in the last stages of HIV at the Mercy Centre's first HIV/AIDS clinic, in the Klong Toey slums, Bangkok.

### Cambodia

On Thailand's eastern border is Cambodia where in the mid-1970s the nightmare of Khmer Rouge violence was at its height.

In this country, the size of Tasmania, a generation of educated civilians was exterminated when even the wearing of spectacles — a sign of being able to read — was a threat not tolerated by the murderous regime.

MMC began its care for handicapped Cambodians through supporting the work of Bangkok-based Australian, Rosemary Taylor, assisting several projects in urban and rural Cambodia.

### Sister Cecile

Rosemary was aware of the extraordinary ministry of Sr Cecile Letibe at the Providence Sisters' mission in Battambang, Western Cambodia, former Khmer Rouge heartland.

Displaced and disabled youngsters were Sister's special care as the mission became a haven for children of all ages as well as a base for rural development projects.

MMC has been proud to play a small part in support of this mission.



### Lavalla school

In 1997 MMC's Sr Vivienne Goldstein SM initiated efforts to secure AusAID funding for the establishment of a school for physically handicapped children in Phnom Penh.

After early setbacks MMC was finally able to fund, with AusAID, the first "Lavalla school" under the directorship of Marist Brother, Terry Heinrich.

This project gave disabled youngsters a rare chance at education and the hope of getting into Cambodia's high school system.

The children were afflicted with a range of debilities from polio myelitis, cerebral palsy and the ever-present landmines.

Within three years the Brothers were able to build a new "Lavalla" on the capital's outskirts as more and more young Khmers gained access to advanced educational facilities.

MMC continues to channel funds from Lavalla supporters to Br



1999. *Above:* Sr Cecile Letibe brings weekly food and friendship to this woman suffering from cancer of the face. *Left:* 16-yr old Nea Keo lost both legs in a landmine train disaster. He has lived at the Providence Mission during high school and pre-employment years. A painting of this photograph hangs in MMC office, Hunters Hill, NSW.



**1999. Top & centre left:** These students were recruited from Phnom Penh's "Rehab Craft" centre to receive non-formal primary education at the first Lavalla. **Lower, left: Veh** has use of only one limb. He now attends high school thanks to a start from Lavalla. Most teachers at the school have some physical disability.

**2003. Below, right:** Students of MMC-funded PELG. MMC hopes to bring 17-yr old, **Ban** [sitting, back right] to Australia in April 2004 to meet benefactors and PELG friends.



**1999: Above:** One of Cambodia's many youngsters disabled by polio is **Bun Lee** at the first Lavalla school in Phnom Penh.

**2003: Below:** At 15 yrs **Bun Lee** is now a member of the PELG community attending a high school and preparing for employment and his future place in Cambodian society.

## PELG

In 2001 MMC offered Lavalla's administrative officer, Nimul Ouch, a research visit to Australia to explore modern handicapped facilities.

During the visit Nimul shared his vision of halfway home for graduates of Lavalla school as they moved towards employment.

MMC funds enabled "PELG" to begin: the Project for Employment of Lavalla Graduates. It is a fine example of one successful project building on another.

### Ban's Big Bike Ride

Our Winter newsletter spoke of plans for a PELG student to come to Australia for next year's Big Bike Ride. MMC friends in several centres will have the opportunity to meet 17-yr old polio victim, Ban.

In April Ban will join Fr Ron on the MMC Big Bike Ride using a hand cycle similar to ones used in Cambodia by disabled persons. At overnight stops evening functions will enable MMC friends to meet Ban who represents the many handicapped youngsters they

Polio has not yet been eradicated in Cambodia, a legacy of the Khmer Rouge massacre of a generation of doctors. Poor medical facilities mean that children with congenital disabilities and infant diseases grow to adulthood with their handicaps not addressed. Education and employment escape most of these



**Right:** Ban and a hand cycle similar to one he will use as he joins Fr Ron on MMC's annual Big Ride in April, 2004. MMC friends will have opportunities to meet Ban as he rides.



Help for the handicapped...

## Bangladesh

The Marist Missionary Sisters have worked amongst the poor of Bangladesh for two decades. The Sisters have long had a special focus on the needs of women and girls particularly amongst the poor and those most unable to help themselves.

Thanks to the skills and dedication of Australian religious and doctor, Sr Jenny Clarke SMSM, they have been able to address the medical needs of many women.

Funds channeled through MMC have assisted the Sisters in their ministry.

### The handicapped of Dhaka

From their base in Dhaka City the Sisters now reach out to groups of

mentally and physically handicapped persons, mostly children and young adults.

Regular group sessions in educational therapy are complemented by home visits in the nearby slum districts of Dhaka.

MMC funds are helping with the training of lay staff for this work to support the Sisters'



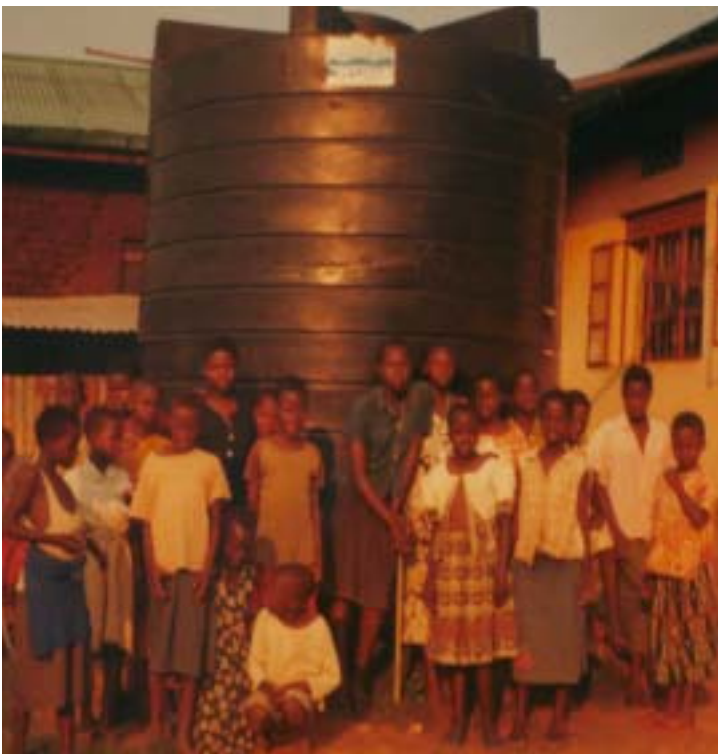
*Above:* Lay worker, **Jane Gomes** [left], with **Sr Susan**. **Jane's** new training will add important skills to the ministry. *Left:* **Sr Jenny Clarke** joins in the fun of handicapped persons in Dhaka. *Below:* **Sr Susan** leads the handicapped ministry of the Sisters in Bangladesh.



# Your donor dollar

*Clockwise from top right:*

1. MMC's first task is to support the international missions of the Marist Fathers. An important part of this is the formation of young Marists in mission areas. Pictured are second year students of Marist College, Bomana, PNG, proudly wearing embroidered shirts, a gift of MMC. 2. Karen refugee students of 'True Life in God' mission, Mae Tao, Thailand, enjoy MMC support. 3. AusAID-MMC funds enable these Bangladeshi women to access loan funds for income generating projects. 4. MMC has provided water tanks for the orphans of Don Dino Institute, Arua, Uganda. 5. St Louis' school, Kiribas, is now safe from rising sea levels thanks to this sea wall built with MMC help. ⑩



# Missionary faces at MMC

Marist missionaries and other visitors are always welcome at MMC office, Hunters Hill, NSW.

*Clockwise from top left:* 1. **Fr Soane Lomu SM**, en route to establish a new Marist community on the island of Futuna, place of St Peter Chanel's martyrdom. 2. **Fr John Hill SM** on vacation from the Marist mission in Nara, Japan. 3. **Fr Kevin Stewart SM**, Cotabato, Philippines. 4. **Fr Tony Reilly SM** assisting MMC to develop project proposals for the Pacific. 5. Marist Brothers, **Chris Wills** and **Allan Sherry**, with MMC's accountant, **Veronica Warton**.



## Thanks from Holy Family

MMC's director visited the giant refugee camp of Mae La, on the Thai-Burma border earlier this year. He left a small cash gift with Saw Nicholas, lay leader of the Catholic community of Holy Family church. The following letter and photo arrived at MMC recently...

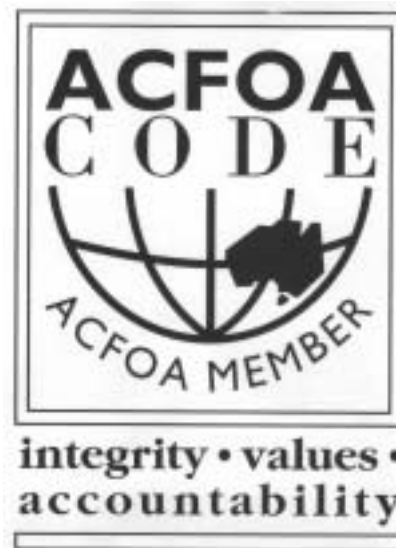
We thank you very much for your gift of 5,000 baht [ca AUD \$200] during

your last visit. We have used this to buy dishes, plates, spoons and cups for our community celebrations. Now we do not have to borrow these things.

Thank you for your kindness to our Karen people. Our community remembers you in our prayer.

Mae La camp is not in a good situation now. We are not allowed to go outside of the camp even for vegetables. It is like being in a zoo. But we do not give up. We hope to return one day to our motherland. I always tell our youth, *'Try your best to become educated persons. Believe and pray to God.'*

Please remember us in your prayer. With love in Christ,



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*Left:* The Catholics of Holy Family community with their recent purchases.