

EAST TIMOR RELIGIOUS OUTREACH

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ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP APPEAL

Dear steadfast and faithful friends,

Returning from a visit to East Timor (Timor-Leste) this past May, I remain inspired by your commitment to provide education opportunities for poor and all too easily forgotten Timorese young people. Your assistance is much needed. Our scholarship recipients and institutional religious partners frequently told me of their gratitude for not having been abandoned by people in the United States. Your ongoing solidarity and concern humble me.

As a result of your generosity, in 2018 East Timor Religious Outreach (ETRO) was able to donate \$6000 to both the Salesian Sisters Vocational School for Girls in the rural mountain village of Venilale, and the Protestant Church in East Timor (*Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosae*, or IPTL) headquartered in Dili. Here follow sketches of two of the thirty-two young people who received ETRO scholarships through the IPTL, provided by Synod Treasurer Rev. Nelyana Nope.

Aong Ling Tong from Lospalos is a recent Management of Accounting graduate from Universidade da Paz. She has 10 siblings. Her father died and the family is supported by her mother selling homemade cakes.

Naksi Maia, from Maliana, where his parents are farmers, also has 10 brothers and sisters. Naksi sold internet simcards to help finance his education. An International Relations major, he hopes to contribute to the development of his country and his church (IPTL), as well as help support his family, by teaching in rural schools.

The longing of Aong Ling and Naksi to help both their family and their nation is characteristic of our scholarship recipients.

This week East Timor Religious Outreach received an update from Timorese scholar Dr. Clinton Fernandes.

2019 finds Timor-Leste still one of the youngest countries in the world, with 46% of the population of 1.2 million people under 18 years old. This exceptionally young population is a continuing legacy of the major population decline that took place in the late 1970s, when as much as 30 percent of the population died as a result of famine induced by the Indonesian military's brutal occupation. Today approximately 40% of children 0 - 14 years old live below the national poverty line of \$46.37 per person per month – the most relevant measure of what it means to be poor in this country. There has, however, been a decline of 8.6% in poverty, from 50.4% in 2007 to 41.8% in 2014.

Professor Fernandes points out that the youthful population presents both opportunities and challenges:

The opportunities stem from the potential to reap a “demographic dividend, a term which refers to an increase in economic growth and income as a result of a large working-age population. Crucially, such a dividend requires a large, sustained investment in education and health. If this investment occurs, then – according to the United Nations Human Development Report 2018, East Timor’s “GDP per capita will rise from \$2,619 in 2015 to \$15,374 in 2030” – a six-fold increase (p. 28).

The challenges stem from the potential for unemployment, crime and instability should such an investment not be made. The risk is even higher when youth are over-represented in a relatively small geographical area, such as the capital of Dili. About 20,000 people enter the labor force each year, but there are jobs in the formal economy for only about ten percent of them (2,000 new job opportunities each year). The overwhelming majority of working adults in East Timor are self-employed farmers. Almost 95% of agricultural

activity is subsistence in nature. Clearly, investment in education is one way to expand the scope of opportunities for the young nation.

What areas of education should receive emphasis? Here, the United Nations Human Development Report 2018 provides some valuable recommendations. The most beneficial areas are tourism, fishing, clean energy solutions, crafts, and dress-making. The most relevant kind of skills development include “bookkeeping, dress-making, culinary arts, sustainable energy studies, sanitation and health care, carpentry, hospitality services, maritime and fishing services, design and technical drawing, and the introduction to motor mechanics” as well as “planning, organization and management,” and “bookkeeping and financial record-keeping, including the use of electronic tools.” (p. 80). These areas have practical relevance for rural areas.

As in years past, East Timor Religious Outreach scholarships will benefit poor students from small, more remote and poorly served areas.

Please make your tax-deductible donations payable to “Hayward First United Methodist Church,” earmarked for “East Timor” on the memo line. There is no administrative overhead. Funds collected are equally divided between our two ecumenical partners, the Protestant Church in East Timor and the Salesian Sisters Vocational School for Girls. Your entire donation goes for Timorese youth and young adult educational scholarships. (A return envelope is enclosed.)

I close with the words of Salesian Sister Joana Goik. They reverberate in my mind: “The young people and the children are East Timor’s most beautiful thing. That makes the time spent among them unforgettable.”

With heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you,

Rev. John Chamberlin, National Coordinator
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