

Jesuit Mission News

with News from India

No 580 January–February 2010

www.jesuitmission.org.au



Dear Friends of Jesuit Mission

Just before Christmas we watched anxiously as the world's leaders meeting in Copenhagen struggled to find a way to deal with climate change.

The billions of people who inhabit this amazing planet, the innumerable species of plants and animals, all of us are touched by the threat of climate change. Recently Fr Steve Curtin, the Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia, wrote, 'The astronauts who landed on the moon looked back through space and had the experience of seeing our home as a fragile, small, blue gift from God that we must learn to care for and to share in peace.' Have we always done this?

In one of the most poignant stories in the Bible God asks Adam and Eve, 'Where are you?' and Adam replies, 'I heard the sound of you in the

garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' Has our desire for more and more left us feeling naked like Adam? It's a sad truth that often we have filled our cupboards with clothes and our kitchens with food, but we have left so many people in the world naked and hungry.

In two stories from Cambodia we read how two Cambodian nuns who share their lives with the poor have been able to give people hope. Sister Ath runs a micro-credit scheme in the villages, and a sugar cane farmer named Mom Yom tells us how it saved his family from destitution. Sister Paqui takes children living in a Cambodian jail for a day of joy. These may seem small events in our huge globalised world, but they are rays of hope inviting us to see the world and our neighbours in a different way.

Phil Crotty SJ



Seeing the world in a different way

Building a house in a village

Sister Ath founded a farmers' cooperative in Angsnoul district in Cambodia. Here she asks sugar cane farmer, Mom Yom, to tell how the cooperative has changed his life.

My wife and I live in a village named Trea, in a commune, Prey-Pourch, in the Angsnoul district. I am 37 years old and my wife is 36. We were married in 1994. After the wedding, I moved to live in my mother-in-law's house, a widow who lives in a small thatch house.

At the present time we have five children, three girls and two boys. Two of our children go to the primary school and the youngest is five months old.

To make our living, we produce sugar palm, and to start this kind of activity we needed materials like bamboo to serve as a ladder, containers to collect the sap, a big pan and firewood to cook the juice. That is why we had to borrow money in order to start the production.

In our village, Jesuit Services Cambodia opened a Farmer Solidarity Association in 1993, but I was able to borrow money only in 1997, because the association got stuck with unpaid loans.

The sugar production is a very difficult process, bringing little benefit to the producer. But it is the only job available that I could find. I only have five sugar palm trees, so I have to rent 25 more trees. The renting fee for one tree is five kilos of sugar a year.

Every day I have to climb 25-30 trees twice; once in the morning at 6 o'clock up to 10 o'clock, and then in the afternoon, from 2 o'clock to 5 o'clock, in order to collect the sap and put the new containers under the flowers. Meanwhile, my wife is busy with the sugar cooking, preparing the food, and caring for the children and the house.





Mom Yom and his wife gather sap containers in preparation for the days' work ahead

Our production is about 20-25 kilograms of sugar a day. We sell some of it for our daily living in food sustenance (apart from rice that we produce ourselves whenever the sugar production ends, which lasts for six months), medicine, clothing, village participation for celebrations etc. The rest of the production we keep to sell at the end of the season with a good price to get some profit and [before 2005] to buy things in preparation for the construction of our new house.

This means that we cannot invest our profit for the next year's production. And thus, we end up borrowing money from one season to another. During the 11 years that we kept borrowing money, we were able to have profit enough to buy some gold, two small rice fields, an ox, enough wood to build the walls, 12 columns for the new house, and to pay for labour cost.

But we still needed other materials and we had to sell one piece of land that we bought in 2001, in order to meet the construction needs. Our house was built in 2005.

Since that time, we continue to borrow money and produce sugar in order to continue building the ground floor of the house. But we could not finish it yet, because since the birth of my last son in 2006, my wife got sick several times, and we had to spend around US\$1000 for her treatment.

Left: Mom Yom and his wife in front of their new house

For many years our poor family has needed to work and save money in order to build a house. That is why we are grateful to the Farmers Solidarity Association, which gave us this opportunity. If we had to borrow money from the city, we would not be able to have this profit because of the big interest they would charge us. Apart from that, with the Farmers Solidarity Association we are not afraid of our properties being confiscated, which happens often with the 'loan shark' when we are not able to pay on time.

The gift of a lifetime

Over the years, friends of Jesuit Mission have greatly helped our work by remembering us in their Wills. If you would like to remember Jesuit Mission in your Will, you can help to ensure the future of this great work of faith, love and service. Your legacy will make a lasting contribution to the lives of thousands of the world's poorest people.

The following form of words may assist you in drawing up your Will.

I give to the work of Jesuit Mission (ABN 78 683 857 984)

The sum of \$

or % of my total estate

or the residue of my estate,

and I declare that the receipt of the Director of Jesuit Mission will be full and sufficient discharge for my Executor.

JESUIT MISSION GOLF DAY

Sydney

29 March 2010 at Pymble Golf Course.

Melbourne

19 March 2010 at Green Acres, Kew.

Players and sponsors welcome.

Individual and team entry forms are available at www.jesuitmission.org.au or call 02 9955 8585



God has two hands

On a rare outing with a group of children who live in prison along with their convicted mothers, Sr Paqui Picón who works in the Prefecture of Battambang in Cambodia, realises the importance of God's liberating embrace.

The Kite Runner is a Khaleid Hosseini novel that I read last year in Spain. It still remains in my memories today and its topic, friendship, remains eternal.

I was reminded of this novel some days ago when I looked up and saw seven white kites with long blue and violet tails flying in the sky, dancing over the tips of the thatched-roof houses north of the park where we had taken a group of boys who were living with their mothers in the prison of Svay.

In that moment, there was only joy in those boys' faces – like nothing in the world could worry them.

Sonam is one of the kids we took along. His mother was imprisoned when she was pregnant with him and so he was born in the prison. Today he is five years old



Sister Ath talks to the villagers

and this 'outing day' was the first time he was able to play outside his cell, away from that awful smelling and fly-infested corridor he has to live in day after day.

When I looked at the joyful expression in his face, I thought that every single effort we made to get the permission to take them out for a day had been worth it. Especially since flying those kites had taken them away from their tough and inhuman reality.

When we were taking them back to the prison, I was overwhelmed to see them going back to their depressing compound jumping for joy, like they had just lived the best experience of their lives and they could not wait to share it with their friends.

These kids that ran back happy to their mothers' arms will one day know that their lives were always held in the love of God's hands, like those kites held and guided by their little hands.



Cambodian children in school



Jesuit Mission
"in all things to love and to serve"

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Jesuit Mission News is published six times a year Print Post Approved PP349181/00370