East Timor is still one of the poorest countries in the Asia-Pacific region especially because its economy remains fragile.

During February and March, Warren Smith from the Port Melbourne/ Middle Park Carmelite Parish, Carmel Dorman, the previous Provincial Secretary and I visited Timor-Leste. The country and especially the capital city Dili is continuing to progress at a very fast rate with its building infrastructure.

While in Timor-Leste we experienced the country campaigning for the first round of the presidential elections. Everyday life was very peaceful and we were privileged to take part in a large Peace Rally that was held before the election along one of the main Dili roads. A presidential election was held in Timor-Leste on 17 March and 16 April this year in order to choose a president for a five year term. The election was seen as a test for the "young democracy" in seeking to take control of its own security. It ran smoothly and the former military commander Taur Matan Ruak was elected as president in a second round runoff. The parliamentary elections will be held in June.

While Carmel and Warren were in Timor-Leste they did some skills training in Finance with the Carmelites. Warren assisted the Timorese bursars to establish budgets and to plan for future essential projects. Carmel taught basic excel skills to the younger Carmelite seminarians who are training to be bursars. I ran another English Programme for the Carmelite students. I was also able to download an English programme on the laptop computers that have been donated to the Carmelites in Timor-Leste by Whitefriars College at Donvale.
Like many other young adults the Carmelite students enjoyed the challenge of working through an English Programme on the computers. They appreciated learning new computer skills, embracing the task that each new exercise presented and having the opportunity to listen to English conversation.

New Visitor’s Centre in Zumalai
To my surprise this building was very near completion when we arrived in Zumalai after an 8 hour drive through Timor-Leste’s mountain range in heavy rain. Br Antonio was very proud of the new building and wanted us to see it immediately. This new building on the Carmelite Zumalai compound is the only accommodation in Zumalai sub-district for visitors. The previous accommodation has been converted to a Youth Centre so new accommodation has been an urgent need.

The Visitor’s Centre is a large building that has been planned very well in order to cater for the many visitors that need accommodation in Zumalai. The visitors include Carmelites from Dili and Hera, other members of religious orders, friends of the Carmelites, non-government groups and government groups. Even Xanana Gusmao has stayed on the Carmelite compound in Zumalai. There are 5 bedrooms in the building. One is large and will have two double bunks. There is a veranda surrounding two of the walls of the building and all the floors will be tiled.

New Visitor’s Centre Nearing Completion

Project Focus — 2012-2014
Over the next three years the Carmelites are targeting “Education” as their major focus. Three new classrooms will be built at Raimea village Primary, School, a new boarding house will be built and more Zumalai students will be given the opportunity for Tertiary Education.

Tertiary scholarships are much more expensive as there is more travel involved, especially for those students doing courses in Indonesia; students also now need access to computers and mobile phones and the costs of living in Timor-Leste have increased.

The 10 students who board at Zumalai with Br Antonio OCarm
On the Carmelite compound in Zumalai there have always been about 5 boarders. A change to the education system this year has meant that primary schools include years 1-9. A year 7 class has therefore been set up on the Carmelite compound with Fr Manuel as principal. In light of these changes the diocese has requested that the Carmelites open a boarding house in Zumalai to accommodate students from outlying villages attending school. In Zumalai this year there are 10 boarders ranging from two primary school orphan students to two Yr 12 students who are attending Zumalai Senior High School. Three of these students are on scholarships funded from Australia. At present the students are sleeping in the old boarding house. The new boarding house will accommodate 15-20 students and include a dormitory, dining room, kitchen and study area.

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