

The Love That Surprises: lessons from Timor-Leste

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching underpin the elements of good developmental accompaniment in the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council's latest booklet, *The Love That Surprises: Lessons from Timor-Leste* by former Caritas country director of the Timor-Leste program, Mark Green.

Green explores lessons that can be learned from working alongside people as they strive to achieve a better life for their community.

Visiting a project in Barique that Caritas Australia had been supporting in 2008, Green reflects on how, in 'encounters with the most marginalized in the remotest places, we are often blessed beyond our dreaming'.

'Among the blessings received that day, I was reminded that the practice of integral human development, in its richest form, is born of a series of deepening encounters through which everyone participating becomes a truer and richer human person.

'Ignatius of Loyola reminded those undertaking his spiritual exercises that

...love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what he has or out of what he has or can; and so, on the contrary, the beloved to the lover. So that if the one has knowledge, he gives to the one who has it not. The same of honours, or riches; and so the one to the other.

(www.ccel.org/ccel/ignatius/exercises.iv.html)

A potted history of the country going back to the first Dominican arrival in 1515 gives an important context for the need for development today, illustrated in statistics that show nearly half the (1,200,000) population live on less than one dollar per day, more

than 60 percent of people still lack access to an improved water source, only half the country's adults can read and write and 46 percent of under five-year-olds are underweight.

An important chapter outlines development lessons learned from Caritas projects in Barique, Sobagolau and Aosero including the imperative that people should be enabled to attain development in accordance with their culture. Observing that the village of Barique was surrounded by forest and therefore the land cool with abundant rainfall, for nine months of the year instead of Dili's three months, Green suggested that the community knew the strength of their resources and they did not want to improve their agriculture at the expense of their environment.

They decided to clear 50 hectares of land near the river, an hour's walk from the main *aldeia*. 'They had judged that while the risk of flooding was high, a flood would have less impact on their lives than the loss of their trees and forest together with the ensuing soil and land erosion. The *suco*'s sense of the presence of their ancestors, together with their sense of the life of the land, was palpable' (20).

Inspired by the Catholic Bishops' 1971 statement 'Justice in the World', Green discerns seven lessons from the Caritas meeting with the Barique village leaders.

1. Any development activity must respect what the community decides is the right approach in designing a program.
2. Respect for the community and permission to own the design, ensures that the resulting program will be appropriate, sustainable and life-enhancing.
3. Partners of the community in their own development are resources in the search for technical and developmental solutions.
4. Enhancing spiritual harmony and maintaining right relations in development practice is fundamental to generating greater physical wellbeing in people's lives.
5. A development partner is invited by a community to share in the

life of the community and to be a real friend, respecting the community's boundaries.

6. Communities expect development partners to be active participants within the frameworks that culture allows and which culture calls on them to observe. 'In Barique, the village leaders gave us a tour of their life and culture before any program or project design was discussed. The context which shapes people's lives is as important as the detailed expression of their hopes and aspirations' (22).

7. 'There are indeed injustices and inequities, as well as structures which confine people in poverty. The process of exchange which brings them to light, however, together with the process of development itself, is as important as the desired outcome. In Barique, the aim was to reduce the instances of disease and enhance physical wellbeing by providing clean water and increasing food security. In the process of talking about the community's history and life, however, bonds of solidarity and understanding were being forged across diverse communities in Timor-Leste and between people from different nations' (22-23).

In expounding on ways in which the three projects have illuminated the development partnership Caritas is pursuing with the villagers, Green draws on Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* 2006, the US Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, 'Economic justice for all', Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* 1967, the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* 1965 and 'Justice in the World' 1971. This booklet is no 69 in the Catholic Social Justice Series and can be ordered here.

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_papers.html