The Social Justice Group of Sacred Heart Parish, Sandringham, has been meeting for over ten years. In addition to raising awareness of social justice issues, particularly in regard to indigenous people, it has also been active in supporting the people of Remexio, East Timor. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information about the work of the Group to our parish and school communities, which generously support our efforts from year to year.

Our Twin Parish
Our twin parish of Remexio is in East Timor (Timor-Leste), one of our closest neighbours, the poorest country in Asia and one of the poorest in the world. Although some development is occurring in Dili, the more remote areas (like Remexio) are still suffering poverty, unemployment and starvation. Education is not available for many children. The work of the SJG, and the support of the parish and the school, addresses some of these needs. Through our partnership with Mary Mackillop East Timor Mission (MMETM), we can be confident that the assistance we provide goes directly to the people in need.

Communication with Remexio
This year, for the first time, we have had direct contact with Fr David, the Parish Priest of Remexio. Through emails to Fr Frank and the Group, Fr David expressed his gratitude to the parish of Sandringham: “Every Thursday morning at 6.30 am we offer the Mass especially for our friends, donators and our twin Parish of Sandringham that already helps us with much money. We know you did many activities, many sacrifices to raise the money for our Parish in Remexio. We cannot pay back your offering, your kindness, but we will always pray for you.” Fr David informed us that there are more than 11 000 parishioners, 99% of whom are subsistence farmers.
Visit to Remexio

In September this year, a small group of members of the Social Justice Group plan to visit Remexio to further develop our relationship with the people there. Fr David is enthusiastic about the proposal, keen to discuss more about what we can do in the future. We also hope to gain a better understanding of the needs of the people and how we can best support them.

The Importance of Education

Efforts made to enable access to education and to raise the standard of education available are vital for reducing poverty and enabling people to reach their potential. Education is vital both for individuals and for the young nation of East Timor as a whole. The East Timor Raffle, held each year and drawn at the parish dinner on the feast of the Sacred Heart, is our big effort towards improving education in Remexio. The proceeds of this raffle ($6322 in 2010) provide funds for teacher salaries in schools in the Remexio area. Generous donations of school uniforms have been sent via Mary MacKillop East Timor Mission. Our Christmas Appeal gives the Sandringham parish the option of funding books, trade tools and other educational resources. The generosity of parishioners is making a significant contribution to the futures of young people in East Timor.

Health and Nutrition

With a high child mortality rate (35% of it attributed to malnutrition) and a short life expectancy, health and nutrition are key issues for most East Timorese. Through the MMETM Compassionate Care Program, the basic necessities of life (rice, oil, noodles, etc) are provided both to families and to frail and elderly individuals in the Remexio area. The annual Christmas Appeal ($8 835 in 2010) and the sales of coffee ($3242) were the major sources of funds for this Program. In addition, we have been able to obtain donations of medicines such as worm tablets, Panamax, Betadine and vitamins from companies in Melbourne. These have been sent to health workers in East Timor for distribution to those in need.
Local Cooperation
The Social Justice Group enjoys its contact with the Bayside Friends of Laleia who support a community in the east of East Timor. We benefit from hearing about their efforts, especially from guest speakers, and we provide coffee for their Coffee and Dessert evenings. We also enjoy serving and selling coffee at the annual Open Gardens program in Bayside supporting Southern Family Life.

Aboriginal Focus
The Social Justice Group is keen to develop an Indigenous focus in our activities. You will have noticed the acknowledgement of Aboriginal peoples, especially the traditional owners and custodians of the Sandringham area, which now appears in each parish bulletin. Soon we will be able to welcome the beautiful Message Stick which was handed over to members of the Social justice Group in a moving ceremony by Betty Pike, elder at Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne.

Sacred Heart Parish and School
We hope that this newsletter makes you more aware of the great generosity of the people in the school and the parish in contributing to making a difference to the lives of others. We encourage you to continue your generous support.

We Need You
The Social Justice Group is always looking for new members and new ideas. You are welcome to speak to one of our members, contact us via the parish email or come to our next meeting on July 6 at 7.30pm in the parish meeting room.