



School Trips and Visits to Viqueque in 2024 *by Patrice Hall*

The opportunities for Geelong schools returning to Viqueque post COVID are increasing and we look forward to hearing updates from those schools. Clonard College and Christian College are planning student trips in 2024. Small groups and individuals are also travelling to Viqueque and will be warmly welcomed.

Viqueque is progressing in general but unemployment is still the biggest issue with 60-70% unemployed; this is soul destroying for the young people. Viqueque is an increasingly busy but wonderful place full of friendly faces and great hope. Some fantastic opportunities are now available in Viqueque such as Caritas who are prepared to talk with students about the work they do.

We can underestimate the impact of our visits in maintaining and strengthening our connections with the Viqueque community. For the regular visitors it is an amazing feeling to step off the plane in Dili and return to this special country. For many the Timor-Leste connection has changed so many lives both in the Geelong community and in Viqueque.

Science and Technology Centre and Educational Support for Viqueque Update *by Jonathan Chapman*

Recently over 100kg of school materials were sent to Viqueque via the Rotary group Donations in Kind. This process takes a while to get there, 2 to 3 months, but the folks at DIK assure me that in 20 years they have never lost a box. The contents were a mixed bag of items jammed into every nook and cranny and were largely a result of projects from Kardinia International College students following up on their visit last year as well as donations from Clonard College and Sacred Heart College.



Every time we visit Viqueque we come home with a wishlist from a Viqueque teacher saying, do you think you could get this....? I'm always surprised by the simplicity of the request – soccer balls, volleyballs, basketballs for the PE teacher at VQQ 1, science equipment for 4 September, clean notebooks, new pens and pencil for librarians to dispense to students.

Specific thanks need to be made to:

- Sacred Heart College who donated 6 laptop computers to be dispersed among schools on a needs basis.
- Craig Billows, lab tech at Clonard College who seems to be an endless supply of perfectly functioning secondhand science equipment.

- Kardinia students Asher Lowery and Liv Quirk who chose to collect stationery for librarians, and Owen Thompson and Shanjana Aji who held a soccer tournament to raise money for sports equipment, added to by the KIC PE department.
- Melinda Williams and staff from Bacchus Marsh PS who donated at least 40kg of new notebooks (complete with Australian animals on the covers!), folders, pens and pencils.

The progress on the science and technology centre is also slowly moving forward. Dili International School has let us know that school chemicals have mostly arrived, with another batch to come in a few weeks. They have also kindly offered to mentor Cejar, the newly appointed lab technician at 4 September school. These projects have progressed quite successfully. Many have been at the initiative of individual students who visited Viqueque last year, which indicates the impact visiting Viqueque has on young people. Without doubt there is a long road ahead and this project will keep us occupied for some years to come, but I imagine the possibility of a resource like a functioning science and technology centre, driven by Viqueque teachers in a remote location like Viqueque. It would be one of the first ever in Timor-Leste and if done with purpose, would be quite something to achieve.



Seasonal Worker Program Octaviano & Friends *by Chris Hansen*



Last year, I introduced you to a young man from **Viqueque** who was in Australia as part of the Seasonal Worker program. Octaviano returned home on 25 January after 9 months in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. There are currently 50,000 Timorese waiting to become seasonal workers in an overseas destination.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of spending 8 days with the Timorese seasonal workers, including Octaviano, on a strawberry farm in Albany WA. Work would begin at 5.45am and was labour intensive! Workers were paid according to the volume of strawberries they picked and packed. Some days were devoted to “weeding” and most days finished with time spent in the cafe on the farm preparing fruit for making jams and relishes.

Picking strawberries in Albany was a totally different experience to farming watermelons in the Northern Territory! The strawberry farm was on the outskirts of Albany, which meant accessing supermarkets and local services was possible throughout the week. The watermelon farm was over two hours by road from Darwin! Overall, the Timorese visitors spoke very highly of the local community. Octaviano loved the opportunity to go to Mass on Sunday.

Arriving home for Octaviano was a very emotional time. Although he was very excited to see his family and friends, he still faced an uncertain future in **Timor-Leste**. Unemployment, and all its implications, is still the most critical issue affecting young people in East Timor. No job means no money. Octaviano has already put his hand up to come back to Australia as soon as possible!



Arriving in Darwin 1/5/23



Ready to leave for home 23/1/24



Octaviano at work on the strawberry farm near Albany WA



A celebration of Timorese culture for the local community in Albany



Sightseeing on the south-west coast near Albany



Christmas lunch organised by the local community in Albany



Viqueque Parish News

by Chris Hansen

St Mary of the Angels chapel in Wetali was blessed and opened by Bishop Leandro Maria Alves on Thursday 7 December 2023. At the inauguration, Fr Evaristo Antonio da Costa announced at the celebration that **St Mary of the Angels Geelong** had contributed over US\$23,000 to the construction of the new chapel. On behalf of the Viqueque parish, Fr Evaristo expressed his deep gratitude to Fr Jim Clarke and all Geelong parishioners.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on Friday 8 December, two deacons were ordained priests in the Viqueque church: **Fr Waldimiro Alfonso Viana** and **Fr Justino Afonso de Aquino Pinto**. St Mary's Geelong supported both men on their journey to ordination. The new priests were very grateful to all Geelong parishioners for their support and said they would love to visit St Mary's in the future!

On 25 January, the Viqueque parish, Church of the Immaculate Conception, welcomed their new parish priest: **Fr Tomas Guterres de Aquino Lopes da Cruz**. The former parish Priest, **Fr Evaristo Antonio da Costa**, has moved to the Diocese of Baucau to work in the department of education.



St Mary of the Angels, Wetali (Viqueque Parish)



New priests, Fr Waldimiro and Fr Justino



Bishop Leandro Maria Alves welcomes new parish priest, Pe Tomas Guterres de Aquino Lopes da Cruz



Arriving in Wetali for the opening of the new chapel

Viqueque Community Empowerment and Development *by Chris Hansen*

In 2023, Chris Hansen, GVFS committee member, was appointed to the Board of Viqueque Community Empowerment. The Board's Mission is the protection of women and children from domestic violence, building the capacity of young people for the future, developing strategies for disaster risk reduction and promoting and modelling sustainable agriculture.

Members of the Board are required to consult and network widely on all topics and participate in the development of policies, guidelines and programs.

The Board met on 5 December 2023 and discussed the following items:

1. Projects: "Days for Girls" kits were distributed in August 2023. A further 400+ kits will be distributed in 2024. Patrice Hall and Chris Hansen have completed the online training for "Days for Girls" and "Men Who Know".
2. Community Development: The "Parish Twinning Cup" will be held in 2024 and will be sponsored by GVFS and St Mary's Parish Geelong.
3. Networking: The Board is very keen for school groups from Geelong to visit their office in Beobe and learn more about Community Empowerment and Development. This would be an excellent opportunity for staff and students to learn about local issues in Viqueque (agriculture, sustainability, protecting the environment, reducing domestic violence and disaster risk reduction) and how the community is working together to improve their quality of life. See Chris Hansen for more information.
4. Opportunity: The Board is looking for an overseas volunteer to join their organisation in 2024. This would be an outstanding opportunity to share knowledge and skills, as well as experience everyday life in a developing country.

Viqueque School Garden Project *by Patrice Hall*

The school garden project continues to grow under the guidance of Jaime de Jesus and his volunteers. The garden at Uamori school has been extended, with more students involved and more crops harvested. Some students have told Jaime that with the knowledge and experience they have gained they have implemented small gardens in their homes.

A second school garden project has commenced at Bibileo school, and with the lessons learned from the Uamori project, the initial focus is on water conservation. Following meetings with the Principal, teachers and students, the whole school community is now involved. Further gardens have been requested by Beobe and Buikarin. Focus continues to be on the permaculture principles and ensuring long term sustainability with community involvement and support. After attending two Permatil training camps, Jaime has established a home garden using the principles of permaculture. His yard, bare in August 2023, is now a thriving space of produce - an amazing example of what can be achieved!



*Jaime's
home
garden*

*Uamori
school
garden*



Days for Girls (DFG) Update *by Patrice Hall*

Following the successful trip in August 2023 where reproductive health education and over 160 DFG kits were given to students and teachers in Viqueque, the DFG project continues with 483 kits heading to Viqueque.

The kits have been sewn together in 2023 and provided by the Waurn Ponds DFG group who are thrilled that their work has been sent to Timor-Leste. Transport has been provided by Donations in Kind and funded by the Geelong Soroptomists.

DFG Flipcharts in Tetum have been bought and will be a valuable resource ensuring it is easier to provide the education in the local language.

A follow-up on the impact of the education and distribution of the DFG kits will be done and we are hoping that it shows the girls have more days at school as well as more knowledge about reproductive health.

Those involved in DFG have been quite overwhelmed with how wonderful this program is. When presented, it has been very popular and very needed.



Team Leader



DFG Working Session



Scholarship Program *by Patrice Hall*

The scholarship program has been an important part of the GVFS program enabling students to continue their pre-secondary or secondary education. Support from donors is very much appreciated, however there is still a large shortage of funds for the program to continue at the current level. The AUS to US dollar exchange rate has a huge impact on funds available, currently 61c to US\$1.

If you are a previous supporter or interested in being a new supporter for \$100/year or \$300/3 years, please support this important program.

BSB: 633 000

GVFS Scholarship account number: 144110517

Please add your name for reference

Trivia Night 10 May *by Patrice Hall*

Save the date!

The GVFS Trivia Night will be held on **Friday 10 May** at Clonard College and is the major fundraiser for GVFS for 2024. Presenters Mick and Erin Nunan, who ran the last very successful evening in 2022, are happy to donate their time again. Bookings will open through Trybooking so start planning your tables. Donations of raffle and auction prizes most welcome – we can pick up!
