



## 20 Years On: Memories and Reflections in Timor and Australia

By Mayra Walsh, Community Development Coordinator



The story of the Australian Carmelite's presence in Timor-Leste is intrinsically linked with the birth of one of the youngest countries in the world. In recent years both the Carmelites and Timor have celebrated several significant anniversaries. In 2019, it was 20 years since Timor's historic referendum when 78.5% of the population voted for independence amidst militia violence and threats. In 2021, it was 20 years since the Australian Carmelites took responsibility for the mission in Timor, which Fr. David Hoffman commemorated with some reflections last year.

This year, the 20<sup>th</sup> of May will mark 20 years since the official restoration of Timor-Leste's independence, when the United Nations, which ran the country for 2 and a half years, handed over power to East Timorese leaders. It is with great pride that I can say: I was there! I was in Tasi Tolu, on the outskirts of the capital Dili, in the middle of the night on 19<sup>th</sup> May, when at 12.01am East Timor became the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

In this article I'd like to present the recollections of two Carmelites: Fr. Carlito da Costa Araujo, who was 17 years old at the time and was also at the ceremony in Dili; and Fr. Wayne Stanhope, who was the Prior Provincial during those momentous years.

### Fr. Carlito – 'I felt so proud'

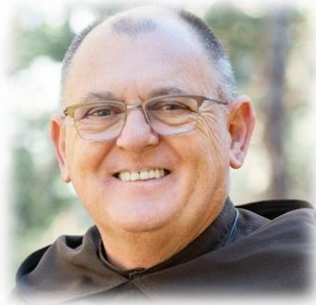
Fr. Carlito remembers the weeks leading up to 20<sup>th</sup> May 2002 well, he was volunteering as part of an organizing committee coordinated by the Secretary General for Youth and Sport. "There were so many activities to commemorate that day. Because I was part of a committee, every day I spent all afternoon and evening at sports events in Dili," he told me in a recent interview. Having an official role in the celebrations meant that on 19<sup>th</sup> May, Carlito was already in Tasi Tolu at 3pm helping set up for the major event which was attended by leaders from around the world, and thousands of East Timorese. "It all had to be set up before 8pm at night. Then people started to arrive. There were lots of special guests, I was actually able to meet [UN Secretary General] Kofi Annan briefly. Everyone was so enthusiastic and happy to be there. There was such a positive feeling."



Fr. Carlito remembers the big screens that were set up, the cultural performances, the music, and the impressive fireworks at the end of the night. "We stayed all night, until the sun came up the next morning. As a Timorese person at that celebration, because I was young and I had been trusted to take on a role, I felt so proud. I felt just so happy because after so many years living in suffering, Timor had finally become independent and been recognized by the international community. I felt that joy through my whole body. In 1999 we had run away, we were hiding, people were threatening us, and then in 2002 we were free and we just felt so happy."

Now, after 20 years of independence, Fr. Carlito has a mixture of feelings, both happy and sad. On the one hand, Timor has found its voice, express its own identity in the world, and has been able to face the challenges that have presented themselves so far. On the other hand, the development process is moving slowly. He says, "there is a big different between the leaders, the rich people, and everyone else. Our prosperity isn't experienced equally and this makes me sad."

### **Fr. Wayne – 'I was very much the learner'**



Fr. Wayne Stanhope had never visited Asia before 2001, when he took on an important role in the Australian Carmelites' engagement with Timor. While he wasn't in Dili for the 20<sup>th</sup> May celebrations, Fr. Wayne remembers 2002 as being an important year for both Timor and the Carmelites, both entities stepping into new territory, making their way through uncharted waters.

Fr. Wayne reflects that for him, visiting Timor was an incredibly steep learning curve. He says, "a couple of things struck me in those early visits. First, everyone was the same economic level. There was no middle class or upper class. Everyone was poor. And second, the story that would be entrusted to me was really one that unfolded over a long time. It takes time for stories to emerge."

The main theme for Fr. Wayne at that time was learning and unlearning. "The woundedness of the people in those early years is my strongest memory. They were deep wounds. I remember going to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's centre at the old goal in Dili. I was quite overwhelmed by that. I was very much the learner. I took a long time for me to accept that position, to be the learner. I would learn something every time I went there and even now, there is still a necessity to accept that we are constantly learning."



### **Lessons on justice and peace**

Anniversaries provide a natural moment in time for pause and reflection. While Timor is holding their Restoration of Independence Day celebrations, in the same week the extended global Carmelite and Catholic family will be celebrating the beatification of Fr. Titus Brandsma. What can we draw on from Fr. Brandsma's life, as we look back at Timor's challenges and achievements?

In responding to this question, Fr. Carlito reflected that "even though the contexts are different, Titus Brandsma's work and Timor's struggle had the same objective: to enable individuals to live with dignity and freedom. The types of situations that Titus Brandsma faced, we also faced. He lived through a conflict situation, and his actions at that time were guided by his concerns about the discrimination and injustice that was occurring. Even now, two decades after independence, we can still continue to follow Brandsma's example in our daily lives in Timor."



Fr. Wayne finds that "it is Fr. Titus Brandsma's conviction that the voice of the oppressed always needs to be heard, so he facilitated ways for people to be heard. He was against the repression of people's voices."

In his time, they were not allowed to give voice to their experience, but Fr. Brandsma refused to be silenced because he saw that as a form of oppression. Now, today, we need to create space for people to speak their experience. We must keep doing that for Timor."



## What are the most important things to know about the IPCC report?

The third and final report from the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) focuses on climate change mitigation – what action needs to be taken immediately to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to alleviate the impacts of climate change.

- **Progress is being made to reduce emissions and tackle climate change**, but it's not nearly enough, and Australia is one of the world's biggest climate handbrakes.
- **We can still turn this around**, but to limit the worst impacts, global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, and halve by 2030.
- **We have virtually all the solutions we need**: we just need to roll them out faster.
- **Fossil fuels have got to go**: avoiding the worst of climate change means abandoning plans for further fossil fuel expansion.
- **The cost of inaction far outweighs the cost of action**, and the decisions we make today will determine our long-term future. Time is running out.

### CLIMATE COUNCIL AUSTRALIA:

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resource/media-releases/>



**CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS AUSTRALIA** has written to the Prime Minister about climate change ....

<https://www.catholicreligious.org.au/media-releases/catholic-religious-urge-government-to-drastically-reform-climate-change-policies>

## something to quietly ponder this week

Prayer by Rabbi Jack Riemer

We cannot merely pray to You,  
O God, to end war,  
For we know that You have made the world  
in a way  
That we must all find our own path to peace  
Within ourself, and with our neighbour.

We cannot merely pray to You,  
O God, to end starvation,  
For you have already given us the resources  
With which to feed the entire world  
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You,  
O God, to root out prejudice,  
For You have already given us eyes  
With which to see the good in all people  
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You,  
O God, to end despair,  
For You have already given us the power  
To clear away slums and to give hope  
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You,  
O God, to end disease,  
For you have already given us great minds  
with which to search out cures and healing  
If we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray to You instead, O God,  
For strength, determination, and willpower,  
To do, instead of just to pray,  
To become, instead of merely to wish.

For Your sake and for ours, speedily and soon,  
That our land and world may be safe,  
And that our lives may be blessed.

May the words that we pray,  
and the deeds that we do  
be acceptable before You, O Lord,  
Our Rock and Our Redeemer.

Amen