

**Empowered villagers in Timor-Leste bring clean water to their communities**

Last week Jesuit Mission held their latest webinar - Water the Gift of Life, about the uplifting impact of the Water Project in empowering rural communities in Timor-Leste.

The webinar welcomed special guests and project partners of Jesuit Mission, Fr Júlio Sousa SJ, Director of Jesuit Social Service (JSS) Timor-Leste and Jose Da Costa Pereira Soares, the Program Manager Assistant of the Water Project, who both spoke about the importance of handing over the project to local leaders.

“We encourage rural communities to be the main authors in constructing and implementing their water facilities. We want them to become the owner of the project and therefore the facility belongs to them and not to us,” said Fr Júlio.

Thanks to the collaboration of many village leaders, over the last four years Jesuit Mission’s partnership with JSS has brought clean water to more than 15 rural villages, transforming the lives of over 5,000 people.

“The communities are very collaborative right from the beginning of the project until we hand it over to them. They actively participate in meetings, share their opinions and concerns and contribute as much as they can by working voluntarily,” said Jose.

With clean and safe water now nearby, communities have become empowered with more agricultural opportunities, have experienced an improved standard of hygiene and children no longer have to walk great distances to collect water before and after school.

“Before (in the village Tocoluli) each student was required to bring five litres of water to school everyday, so that the school can prepare meals and clean the toilets... Just imagine five litres of water for a child to carry to school each day, it is a very heavy burden for them,” said Fr Júlio.

The Water Project will continue to provide 18 life-changing new water systems to rural communities over the next three years, which is vital in Timor-Leste where one-third of people in rural areas do not have access to clean water.

“The gift of water is too often overlooked here in Australia, while many of these vulnerable communities in Timor-Leste have never had the luxury of clean water nearby. This project is so critical in bringing this basic necessity to the lives of these Timorese people,” said Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission.

In some places where JSS has not yet constructed a water tank, villagers still have to buy water, which adds great financial stress to rural families.

“It is sad because even though we are already in the 21st century, people are still struggling with the basic need to access water,” said Jose.

To learn more about the collaboration between Jesuit Mission and JSS in providing rural communities in Timor-Leste with safe and clean water, you can watch Jesuit Mission’s webinar at <https://jesuitmission.org.au/webinar-water/>

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CAPTION: A screen-shot from Jesuit Mission’s webinar Water the Gift of Life. (From top left) Zach Martorana, Communications Officer of Jesuit Mission, (top right) Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission, (bottom left) Fr Júlio Sousa SJ, Director of JSS Timor-Leste (bottom right) Jose Da Costa Pereira Soares, Program Manager Assistant of the Water Project.



Caption: Children from Biluli village in Timor-Leste.



### **Supporting Links:**

Water the Gift of Life Webinar

<https://jesuitmission.org.au/webinar-water/>

### **About Jesuit Mission**

Jesuit Mission works in over 14 countries across Asia and Africa to uphold the innate dignity of people living with the effects of poverty, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable. Funds from our supporters:

- Break cycles of poverty through teaching and education



- Protect the health of communities by providing medical care and programs that improve access to clean water and toilets
- Develop independent, sustainable communities through livelihood training and income-generating projects
- Provide vulnerable individuals with pastoral care, social inclusion and advocacy
- Support refugees in crisis
- Enable effective disaster response and relief.