

REFLECTIONS IN EAST TIMOR

Mission Trip from 10 to 15 Nov 2007. Eternal Life Assembly & Zion Full Gospel Church

“Have You Missed Me? I am Here”

by Mei Ling

Go to East Timor for a student exchange programme with another church. Play games, perform drama, dance, no teaching. This was a most unconventional mission trip. Yet I knew with certainty that I had to go, to stand on the soil of East Timor to hear his heartbeat for the nation. Truly, I was in dire need of a reality check yet again... busyness leading to neglect has wrapped my heart with insensitivity. I have exchanged God's business with my busyness. I had questions too - is this a country that ZFGC should invest resources in? Why East Timor, how, what?

10 Nov 07, Saturday

The team of 14 comprising 6 youths and 8 adults left the comforts of Singapore, flying into Bali for an overnight stay before boarding an early morning flight to Dili, the capital of East Timor.

11 Nov 07, Sunday

What struck us as the plane landed was the barrenness of the land, the scorching hot and dry air. It was a season of unexpected drought for East Timor. As our chartered mini bus drove through the town, we saw the river running through the town entirely dried up. Riverbeds littered with rubbish. Dust. Poverty. I sensed hopelessness.



With Bapa Moses & 3 students

In the evening, we drove around the town and headed to the coast. We walked near a group of local children playing unclothed in the sand, shouting with glee as they swam. Behind us, a hill with 700 steps leading to a large statue of Jesus with an outstretched arm. I quickly removed my shoes and walked into the clear water. I felt promoted to plant my feet on the soil, to feel His heartbeat for the land. As I watched the sun set, the orange glow warmed my heart, and it felt that my spiritual man is being revived. The words of Ezekiel 36:26-31 floated to my mind, *“I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessings. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land, and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them....no one shall make them afraid...I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land....I am your God.”*

After dinner, the team gathered for a time of worship and briefing for the next day's tasks. Pastor Andrew Tan shared from Proverbs 10:11a *“the mouth of the righteous is a well of life.”* Hence, our task as a group was to speak life. Who are we but saved souls covered in His righteousness? Yet he chose us, that *“By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted (Prov 11:11a)”*.

12 Nov 07, Monday

The plan was to paint the basket ball posts, the court and to engage the Laurara secondary school students in tele-match. This is the school in which both churches had donated 100 sets of tables and chairs this year, to benefit the 350 pre-secondary pupils (ages 10 to 19) and upper secondary (ages 15 to 24). The wide age range is because children start schooling late. Education here is free. The school only required students to purchase 2 sets of uniforms.

The ride through the dusty streets and up the windy road was about 40 minutes from Dili to our destination. In the midst of the roar of the engine, I began to feel that the Lord was near. It caught me by surprise. That He would speak through sights of the parched land. Passing the palatial grandeur of the President's house, the issue of my personal pride, my career, came to surface. It was a time of dealing with the issues of the heart. Then suddenly, I sensed an almost audible

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impression, "Have you missed me? I am here." I turned and looked out into the valleys as the bus wound up the narrow road. Indeed, He is here. The Word said that He is near to the poor, the helpless. We are to give to the poor. In the last days, the Church is to rise up and give, give even more to the poor. Perhaps, this is the calling in this season for ZFGC. To touch the poor, for to do so, we touch Him. Coincidentally, I was reading through John from the start of the trip, and that morning's reading included the feeding of the 5,000.

The children have been waiting almost 2 hours in the sun for our arrival. 700 students decked in their best. Their sincerity was reflected on the large chalk words on the black board with the misspelt words "Hi Hau Mau" (Ni Hau Ma, Chinese for how are you). After the ceremonial welcome, we painted the basketball posts and organized the tele-matches.

We also visited the medical centre after the school but it was closed as it was a public holiday. The two churches had contributed blood pressure instruments and wanted to present rechargeable batteries. Nevertheless, the team had a good time walking around the village and briefly interacting with the people. There were many children with tangled hair, dirty faces, half unclothed. Their yellow tinged hair and skinny bodies reflected their poverty.

During dinner that evening, I had a chance to speak to 3 single female missionaries. Timor is home to a group of single females from various churches in Singapore and Malaysia. One of them spoke to me to say that "Pray for this land, pray for the people. The young are without hope and purpose."

13 Nov 07, Tuesday

As the bus chugged along, again, the journey up to the school was a time of communion. The words that impressed upon me that morning were from Isaiah 43:17 - 21, "*Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness. And rivers in the desert...This people I have formed for myself, they shall declare My praise.*" I was led to ask for God's forgiveness for the pride of Christian ministries who have come into the land in the past, and built their own kingdom. Also, I felt it was a time to speak newness of life into the country, the release of hurts from past oppression that the nation has undergone.

The Lord impressed that, "It is not that they (Timorese) need you, but you (Singapore churches) need me." It's not that they need us but we need Him...Then, I begin to see that the Lord is calling the Church in Singapore out to the fields, and in doing so, to know Him. It struck me then, that mission trips are

not so much about us giving but us receiving. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. What is it that He cannot do, yet He chooses us to be here because He knows we need him. Ah...a mission trip is a privilege to be close to Him. He sows things in our hearts whether we know it or we don't. At a kairós (appointed time) moment, we will suddenly realize and understand. He is reminding me to "Go, catch the vision." To do so require physical departure from my comfort zones, and in going, we "catch the vision."

The second day's programme was a series of games, captain ball, volley ball, street soccer and basketball. The students are indeed very agile and natural sportsmen.

That afternoon, it began to rain heavily. The team members prayed for rain and this unexpected pour was such an encouragement. Pastor Annie, Pastor Andrew and I went along with 2 other Singaporean missionaries to visit Ibu Gomez, the superintendent of the Assemblies of God churches in East Timor. I confessed to her that I knew not how to pray for East Timor for I understand not what the suffering the people have gone through. She then shared her life testimony. When she said the Lord spoke to her that He was born in Bethlehem, I felt a needle-like piercing pain, and for that brief moment, I entered the pain of her

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suffering. As I looked into her eyes, tears welled up in mine. He has answered my prayer, and allowed me to know the pain of the people of this land. It was what I wanted, what my hardened heart needed. She spoke too about the Lord taking away the emotional pain in her own heart in a miraculous manner instantly, and I recalled that that is the Lord's promise for this land, that "He will do a new thing."

That night as I laid to sleep, I felt that I had caught the vision. What the Churches are investing in will prepare the way of His coming.

14 Nov 07, Wednesday

On the journey up the hill, the Word that came to mind was to speak liberty to the land, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17)."

It was the culmination of 3 days of interaction with the students. We had prepared much for that day, from cultural dances, a mime to the song, "God Loves People More Than Anything" to a drama, sharing on the cultures, folk songs, cultural booths which included lantern making, balloon sculpturing. The students too had prepared to showcase their drama, singing and dancing. The occasion was graced by Baby Moses, the sub-district Administrator.

After the concert, it was our privilege to hand over the medals and prizes for the 2 previous days of

games together with T-shirts and calendar for the teachers.

We ended the day with many requests for photos. There were many rounds of goodbyes, promises to remember them and assurances to return.

Bapa Moses brought us to visit another needy primary school. It was a small school perched on a hill, inaccessible by vehicle for some 50 metres. We trooped up to see the place. The school houses more than 200 students in 3 classrooms and 2 bamboo partitions. There are not enough tables and chairs for students.

That night, the team had a debriefing session, and shared their impressions and how God has spoken to us through the trip. It was a time of thanksgiving.

15 Nov 07, Thursday

We visited Andrew Tay, the East Timor Coordinator who helped us to organize logistics and who accompanied us throughout our stay.

In the afternoon, we boarded the plane from East Timor to Bali before catching another flight back to Singapore. On the Dili-Bali leg, there was a brief video clip about saving the children but throughout the clip, it showed schools and students. It was most unusual and perhaps, it was His way of confirming to us that yes, it was a season to be involved in East Timor, and to start with schools.

Hence, this trip has fulfilled everything for me - encounters with the Lord, questions answered and glimpses of His heartbeat for this nation.

Pray for East Timor

- **Government:** Stability. Righteous decisions. Raising up and planting of godly people of influence in the government. Wisdom in connecting with foreign partners, shutting doors to unwise alliances. Ability to harness the wealth of the land to benefit the poor.
- **People:** The move of the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth, that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Breaking down the walls of idolatry and false belief. Protection upon the helpless, particularly the youth, that they will be protected from instigations to violence. Food and care for the poor and the displaced people. Restoration of hope and purpose for living.
- **Church:** A season of renewal, for He desires to do a new thing, Isaiah 32:17-21 for the church and the people of the land. Release unity, faith. The Word of God to be spoken in boldness, bringing transformation.
- **Workers:** Give thanks for workers in the field. Spirit of perseverance, faithfulness, sensitivity, physical protection and provision. As they plough with sweat and tears, they will reap with great joy.

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