

The Marists' LaValla School is the only government-approved school in Cambodia to offer these students equal access to primary education.  
Photo by Conor Ashleigh



# solidarity matters

DECEMBER 2015

Marist Solidarity... working in partnership for change.  
The stories behind the projects where solidarity matters.



Education for every age, CAMBODIA



Supporting higher education, PAKISTAN



Volunteer opportunities now available



1st stage of school refurb, TIMOR-LESTE



2015 Snapshot and Christmas wrap-up



Setting the scene for 2016

## From the Director

Dear Friends of Marist Solidarity,

In this final edition of *Solidarity Matters* for 2015, we reflect on all that our team has achieved during the past year thanks to the generosity of our many supporters and donors.

Featured in this edition is an update on our Pakistan project and an optimistic report from Timor-Leste that the first stage of the Abafala project is running ahead of schedule.

For our Marists working in Cambodia, let us hope that the rainy season is not too unpredictable. The new school year at the LaValla School in Cambodia commenced in October and it is pleasing to see the number of older students with disabilities starting Grade One, where previously they were unable to access any education.

Our commitment to provide equal access to education is at the heart of our work in the Asia and Pacific region and we are very grateful for the tax-deductible donations we have received to date from our 2015 Christmas Appeal to enable this work to develop.

As the year draws to a close, may the season of Christmas advance our common desire to achieve peace for all humankind.

In solidarity,

*Br Allen Sherry*

Br Allen Sherry  
Executive Director  
Australian Marist Solidarity



All students at the Marists' LaValla School gather for morning prayer and exercises each day. Here students in primary school range from 10 to 19 years of age because people with a disability are often hidden from society. Photo by Conor Ashleigh

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## Education for every age at every stage



Photo by Conor Ashleigh

The Marists' LaValla School in Cambodia started a new school year in October and this year's enrolment figures show that of the 35 students starting Grade One this year, 11 are aged 14 years or older. There are two students aged 18, and one student is aged 19. It is positive to see that after years of being hidden from society, these students are being given this opportunity.

LaValla caters for students with disabilities from grades one through to six. There are currently 102 students enrolled, including 67 males and 35 females. 97 students are from remote rural areas and need to live on-site at the school.

LaValla is the only government-approved school in Cambodia to offer these students equal access to primary education.

Without the opportunity to attend LaValla, students with disabilities would either not attend school or drop out early because of social stigma and discrimination, and, without education, students become socially isolated and trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty.

Almost half of all Cambodian students with a disability are illiterate, compared to less than 10 percent of the country's able-bodied students.

More than three quarters of students enrolled at LaValla choose to participate in accelerated learning programs, which enable them to graduate from primary school in three years instead of six.

Once enrolled at LaValla, students undergo medical assessments and personalised rehabilitation plans are developed to improve students' disability-related health.

Health plans may include physiotherapy,

hydrotherapy or the provision of any assistive devices that might be required, like prosthetics, splints, wheelchairs, or walking frames. In some cases, students may be offered surgery to improve long-term physical health outcomes.

Students complete curriculum set by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. Curriculum subjects include English, computers, art, physical education, and traditional Khmer music. Students are also taught basic vocational skills, like sewing and small-scale farming. This is especially important for older children who are of working age.

The Marists established the LaValla School in 1998 to respond to the specific needs of disabled students. Since then the LaValla School has grown to be a successful project that has supported many young Cambodians in preparation for independence in their future.

## Supporting higher education, Pakistan

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Through its 'Operation Shield' program, Marist Solidarity is supporting the education needs of more than 60 boys at the St. John Vianney High School, which is located in the city of Peshawar in Pakistan.

Operation Shield is enabling students—aged between 11 to 15, who are enrolled in grades six through to ten—to continue their education in the 2015-2016 school year.

Male students particularly need support because their families have no other choice than to send them to work where they are generally required to do unskilled labour for very low wages.

Financial support allows low-income families to keep their sons at school, when they would otherwise be required to get

a job to help support their families.

Pressure to send male children to work has intensified in recent times, due to a number of violent attacks by sectarian terror groups in the school's vicinity that have killed hundreds of people, including the wage earners of many families.

This is the third year that Marist Solidarity has supported the Marist Brothers in Pakistan to alleviate some of the financial burdens faced by families bearing enormous hardships.

We would especially like to thank the school community of Newman College in Western Australia, who have generously supported Operation Shield in past years.

**Contact us to support this program today!**

*(donations to this project are tax deductible)*



## New volunteer opportunities available now

What are your plans for next year? Have you thought about volunteering overseas in a Marist project?

Marist Volunteers Australia still has positions available in 2016 for young Marists and experienced teachers in Vietnam,

Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Thailand and many more. Go to our [www.maristvolunteersaustralia.com.au](http://www.maristvolunteersaustralia.com.au) website to find out more.

**Contact us to find out more about our volunteer program**



## First stage of school refurb nears completion, Timor-Leste

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Our partners in Timor-Leste report that excellent progress has been made on the first stage of construction at the Abafala Catholic Primary School and will be ready for the start of classes on January 23.

The school is currently in a state of significant disrepair and is being restored to provide students a safe, clean and greatly-improved learning environment.

Marist Solidarity liaison in Timor-Leste, Brother Tony Clark, reports that local Timorese builders and labourers are providing good quality work and are running ahead of schedule.

The project's first stage includes a new building with three classrooms and new toilets.

Abafala is the only primary school in this very remote community located in the District of Baucau. It is one of the

poorest communities in the district and provides education for 135 students.

A special ceremony was held at the school on September 21 to bless the new foundations. The ceremony was led by Bishop Basilio Nascimento and included representatives from the community and current students. It was followed by speeches and a lunch banquet.

The Diocese of Baucau's Catholic Education Director, Madre Herminia Sarmento, says that teachers at the school are already talking about celebrating the inauguration of the stage one buildings.

Marist Solidarity is grateful for the generous support it has received this year from students and families at Galen Catholic College in Wangaratta, Notre Dame College in Shepparton, and Catholic College Sale.

**Contact us to support this project today!**

*(donations to this project are tax deductible)*



## 2015 Snapshot and Christmas wrap-up

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The Season of Solidarity is in full swing and to celebrate all that we have achieved in 2015 our website now features some of this year's highlights ([click here](#) or visit our website news).

We had a wonderful turn-out at each of our Christmas gatherings, which were held in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. Apart the chance to reconnect with our Marist Solidarity friends, a highlight of the events included the broadcast of an eight minute documentary film about life at the Marists' LaValla School in Cambodia. The film was produced by final year Queensland University of Technology students, including former St Teresa's Catholic College student, Dayna

Yates, as part of their final assessment.

If you were unable to join us for any of these gatherings, but would still like to support our [Christmas appeal](#), we invite you to checkout our featured projects and offer a gift of hope.

We are very grateful for the generosity of our Marist Solidarity supporters and friends throughout the year.

May 2016 bring all of us together in solidarity to act with our hearts and minds and build a better future for communities that need our help.

[Click here to support the 2015 Christmas Appeal](#)



## Setting the scene for 2016

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The new year brings new hope and new opportunities to challenge ourselves to work together for the common good of all humanity.

With this in mind, Marist Solidarity plans to support Pope Francis as he calls all people of goodwill to care for nature and the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters in his 2015 encyclical 'Laudato Si'.

Our theme, therefore, for 2016 is **'Transform our world one step at a time'** and we encourage Marist school communities, throughout Australia, to embrace this—our call to action.

Our 2016 campaign kit features an exciting new campaign

video and learning resources to help start the conversation about recognising the impacts of human-induced climate change and our culture of over-consumption of the Earth's resources.

The kit also includes activities to help us focus on the small steps we can each take to care for our Mother Earth and assist the most vulnerable, often the young, in our region of Asia and the Pacific.

The 2016 campaign kit will be available from January 19. Send an email to [msol@marists.org.au](mailto:msol@marists.org.au) for a sneak peak of what's in store.

[Click here to contact us about next years theme](#)



*Support us as we work in partnership for change*

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### AUSTRALIAN MARIST SOLIDARITY

The DFAT approved Marist international development agency and full members of ACFID. AMS is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

### MARIST ASIA-PACIFIC SOLIDARITY

The Marist agency supporting education, faith formation, Marist Ministry and welfare projects across Asia and the Pacific.

### MARIST VOLUNTEERS AUSTRALIA

The Marist volunteering arm in Australia offering volunteering opportunities across Asia and the Pacific.

[www.australianmaristsolidarity.net.au](http://www.australianmaristsolidarity.net.au)

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