

Timor-Leste



East Timor, or, Timor-Leste is officially known as the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. It is an island nation located in southeastern Asia just off the northwestern coast of Australia. It includes the eastern part of the island of Timor as well as two smaller islands and a small region on the west side of the island. In all, its land mass is slightly larger than the state of Connecticut. The population of Timor-Leste is only a third of that state's. The capital of Timor-Leste is Dili.



A view of the mountainous island

Most people who live in Timor-Leste are Catholic (about 97%); the rest of the population are mostly other Christian denominations. This is because the island was originally colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th century. They brought Catholic missionaries with them when they came to the island. The government of Timor-Leste recently said that the Catholic Church “for 500 years has provided great spiritual, human and material support for the people of Timor, making a decisive contribution towards Timor-Leste’s process of liberation”.

The country has a violent past, marked by war, ethnic conflicts, and occupation by foreign powers. This affected everything from the official language imposed on people (switching from Portuguese to Indonesian and back again) to the level of education in the population.

Timor-Leste has had an independent government recognized by the international community since 2002. Between 2001 and 2010, adult literacy rates rose from 37% to 53% and continue to climb.

MCA in Timor-Leste

Most Timorese (about 70%) have access to clean drinking water, but many do not have improved sanitation facilities. This leads to high levels of water borne diseases—bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. Malaria and dengue fever are also widespread health problems as is childhood malnutrition—almost 40% of children below the age of five are underweight.

Sister Fatima works in a school that also runs a feeding program for children outside the capital city of



Dili; it is run by her order, the Dominican Sisters. Sister teaches a kindergarten class.

During the week, the children come for school and are fed what may be their only nutritious meal of the day. On weekends, the facility is converted into the local Catholic church—a priest arrives and the local people are fed spiritually on the Word of God. This work is supported, in part by the Pontifical Mission Societies, one of which is the Missionary Childhood Association.

Sister's school has benefited greatly from visits of high school and college students sponsored by our Mission Office in Australia. They come during their school vacation on mission trips and help by painting, doing basic carpentry, and most importantly, playing with the children.

Not all places are so accessible and therefore so lucky.

Saint Lukas Orphanage is run by the Sisters of Charity Mother of Mercy. Their facility is sparse and spare and lacking proper ventilation. Meals are cooked over an open fire, not in a modern kitchen.



Students are taught in one large room—their classrooms are formed by plywood panels.



Still, they are happy for the educational opportunity so that they can have more possibilities for their futures.

"It is hard to imagine how many lives would not be transformed if not for the tireless service and faith-filled dedication of the religious sisters, brothers and priests, as well as lay volunteers in Timor-Leste," said David McGovern, Director of our Brisbane, Australia office on a recent visit.

Please continue to pray and sacrifice for the children of Timor-Leste and the missionaries who serve them!

Missionary Childhood Association

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