



ASIA/EAST TIMOR - "Too many" seminarians: a challenge for the month of the missions

Dili (Agenzia Fides) – Vocations boom in East Timor: in the small Asian country with a Catholic majority, the local Church smiles for the exponential growth of seminarians, which goes beyond the most optimistic forecasts. As reported by the local Church to Fides, the Major Seminary of St. Peter and Paul in Dili today is barely able to provide for the 126 seminarians who are completing their studies and it is already having to think about adapting the buildings to provide adequate space for all the young men to attend lectures, study, share meals, and have recreation. This is why the Pontifical Mission Societies, in particular in Australia, has launched an aid project in this missionary month, to help in providing for new priests, missionaries, and church leaders in East Timor. With a seminary moving full steam ahead, even priestly ordinations are thriving: 36 between 2006 and 2008. The Church in East Timor has always been a symbol of courage, strength, and hope, and still plays a key role in the reconstruction of the moral, civil, and social life of a nation that was devastated by a conflict that led to its independence after the referendum of 1999 and that had to start from scratch in rebuilding their entire system and state structures.

For this population, 75% under the age of 30, continues to look to the Catholic Church as a solid point of reference and a "safe haven" in the search for identity. This can be seen among young people that "compete" in search of stones for building a new church to be built in the village of Ossu, just south of Baucau. In the parish of St. Therese, which covers a territory with over 20,000 faithful, Fr. Tiago Soares da Costa, a local priest for three years, has seen an exponential growth in participation in Sunday Mass and pastoral activities. At present, however, there are only 150 people who attend Mass while, in the larger liturgical celebrations, thousands of faithful crowd outside the building, even without there being an adequate sound system. This is why Fr. Tiago was forced to start "gathering stones" and bids for the construction of a new church, and the faithful are responding enthusiastically to the initiative. Fr. Tiago continues his collection and also receives support from the Pontifical Mission Societies of Australia, who have placed the projects in East Timor among their featured aid projects for the October Missions Month. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/10/2010)