

JPIC 88 – JULY 2019

Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit.. [Rule of Saint Albert]  
Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spiritu Santo Nian .. [Regula Sto Alberto]

## Remembering East Timor's Vote for Independence 1999

**Mayra Walsh**

Community Development Ministry Coordinator for the  
Carmelite Province in Australia & Timor Leste.

This year Timor-Leste will commemorate 20 years since one of the most significant events in the young country's history, the 30 August 1999 Referendum. After a 24 year-long struggle against Indonesian occupying forces, 98.6% of registered voters turned up to vote in the ballot. They were given two options:

1. Do you accept the proposed special autonomy for East Timor within the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia?
2. Do you reject the proposed special autonomy for East Timor, leading to East Timor's separation from Indonesia?

A clear majority, 78.5%, voted for independence, or 'separation from Indonesia'.

To mark this milestone, Mayra Walsh interviewed Fr. Augusto Galhos about his memories of that time. Fr. Augusto is currently the Assistant Priest at Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in Zumalai, Timor-Leste. This is what he had to say...



"I was 24 years old in 1999. I was a Carmelite student, studying in Flores, Indonesia. Our Carmelite leaders in Indonesia gave ten of us East Timorese students permission to take leave from our studies and return to Timor to participate in the popular consultation.

I forget the exact date we left Flores. It was about one week before the vote on 30<sup>th</sup> August. It took one day and one night on the ferry. In the past when we travelled on an Indonesian ferry, we were free to move around, to go outside and have a look around. But at that time the ten of us stuck together. We didn't move. We ate together and sat together. It was tense.

When we got to Timor, the situation was 'hot'. There was intimidation. The pro-Indonesia groups would say things like 'if you want to choose independence, you are risking your lives'. But we thought: we have risked our lives for many years already. This is an opportunity for us to decide our own future. Even in a situation which made us feel scared, unsure, distressed, we had our principles.

In Dili, the ten of us split up, each going to our own family's home. I was with my family in Bidau, on the eastern edge of Dili. We didn't have mobile phones back then, so it was difficult to contact each other.

People in Dili prepared for the referendum just like in other elections. What I mean is, the two groups held campaigns. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August they held the last big pro-independence campaign. Lots of people were dancing together, it was really spirited. Then on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August was the last pro-autonomy campaign. There were lots of Indonesian flags up everywhere. Next, everything went quiet.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1999, I woke up early. We ate before we left because we didn't know how long it would take. I was with my mum and my sisters. It wasn't far. We walked about 2km to get to the local primary school, SD Bidau Masaur, where the United Nations had set up a voting station. There were voting stations set up all over Dili. All over the country.



I felt really happy about being able to vote. And I was also worried that I might make a mistake. Before we left home, we reminded each other to do it properly. We knew they had prepared nails, and we had to use the nail to put a hole through the ballot paper. We had to get it right so that our vote was counted.

At the voting station, everything was organized really well. There were United Nations officials there, and Timorese officials too. Also volunteer observers from different countries. There were two lines. We waited patiently in line until it was our turn. There was no-one making any threats because everyone could see. The UN were there. The Indonesian military and police were there providing security. It was a secure place and our votes were secret. I didn't feel scared when I voted.

The voting station was open from 8am, and by 1 or 2pm it was all done. In the afternoon it was empty. In fact, the whole city was empty and it was very quiet. Once we'd voted, we went straight home and stayed at home.

After the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, people started to leave. Everyone knew that once the results were announced, there would be problems. Big problems. No-one told each other, but each person or family started to pack their things and go to the mountains, go somewhere safer. Because the militia lived among us in our neighbourhoods, we couldn't tell each other what our plans were. People didn't even tell their own the children. They were scared their

children would say something to the wrong person. So, they just quietly left.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August us ten Carmelite students gathered together in Motael. It was difficult for us to get out of Timor. There were some scary moments. But, thank God, we were eventually able to leave Timor and all of us made it safely back to continue our studies with the Carmelites in Indonesia.

Now, as an East Timorese citizen, I'm so happy to be celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the referendum. I'm proud that we have our freedom. If we compare today with the past, with colonial times, I feel that we are suffering. But you know, in the past there was change and development, but we weren't in charge of it. Now at least we are in charge of our own country, our own land.

We need to look at how to work together, to collaborate to fulfil our newfound freedom. In the past we had the principle of 'dead or alive, we want freedom'. We were united with this principle. But now this principle has lost its significance. Now people are focused on their political party, their family, their particularly group.

How can we come together again? To embrace diversity, reject discrimination, work for peace, work for the good of all. This is what we need to do to really feel freedom. With freedom comes responsibility. Love for our nation, and love for each other, no matter who we are. Now we need to work hard to achieve wellbeing for our people with the freedom and independence that we have."



*Fr Augusto Galos*

#### **TIME FOR BOTH CELEBRATION AND GRIEVING:**

- ✚ 5 May 1999 Indonesia and Portugal announced that Timor could vote for autonomy or independence
- ✚ 30 August 1999 was the referendum (98.6% of registered voters cast a ballot)
- ✚ 4 September 1999 the results of the referendum were released (78.5% chose independence)
- ✚ 5 September 1999 the violence started
- ✚ 6 September 1999 Operation Spitfire started which involved evacuating the UN staff
- ✚ 20 September 1999 INTERFET forces began deploying to Timor (UN Peacekeepers)



**REFUGEE  
&  
MIGRANT  
SUNDAY**

**25<sup>th</sup>  
AUGUST  
“It’s not  
just about  
Migrants”**

<https://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/>



**DAY OF PRAYER FOR CARE OF  
CREATION—Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September**

**Seasons of Creation –  
1<sup>st</sup> September – 4<sup>th</sup> October**

**FOR YOUR CALENDAR - AUGUST**

- 5 August – Beginning of Homelessness Week
- 6 August – The Transfiguration – 1945 Destruction of Hiroshima by atomic bomb
- 9 August – International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples**  
1945: Destruction of Nagasaki by atomic bomb
- 12 August – International Youth Day
- 16 August – 1975: Return of Wave Hill Station, NT to the Gurindji People
- 18 August – Vietnam Veterans Day
- 21 August – 1939: Election of the first women members of the Australian Parliament: Enid Lyons (House of Reps. And Dorothy Tanghey (Senate)
- 23 August – International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
- 25 August - REFUGEE and MIGRANT Sunday**
- 27 August – 1999 Death of Dom Helder Camara
- 29 August – International day Against Nuclear Tests
- 1<sup>st</sup> September – DAY OF PRAYER FOR CREATION**

We have a lot of work to do. Every time we reach out and assuage someone's hunger, and do that in memory of Jesus, a sense of Eucharist will bring to consciousness the Spirit and the real presence of Jesus--in us, through us, among us. That Spirit alone is capable of transforming us and the world. **Miriam Therese Winter, MMS**

**Australia Ratifies Maritime Boundaries with East Timor**

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA - Australia passed a legislation that sets down maritime boundaries with East Timor on Monday, 29 July 2019 providing a framework for the two countries to split revenue from the offshore Greater Sunrise natural gas field.

"Greater Sunrise will provide new opportunities for income, and commercial and industrial development in Timor-Leste, and is an important part of Timor-Leste's economic future." Under the deal, East Timor is entitled to 70% of the revenue if the gas is piped to the island or 80% if the gas is piped to Australia for processing.

East Timor's Foreign minister said that the country could ratify the treaty on August. 30, the anniversary of a referendum that gave the small Pacific nation, one of the world's poorest, its long-awaited independence in 1999. [Reuters: 29/7/2019](https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/australia-ratifies-maritime-boundaries-east-timor)

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/australia-ratifies-maritime-boundaries-east-timor>

**GROUP HOPES ST KATERI TEKAKWITHA WILL SHOW US IMPORTANCE OF AMAZON SYNOD**

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2019/07/24/group-hopes-st-kateri-tekakwitha-will-show-u-s-importance-of-amazon-synod/>

NEW YORK - Ahead of **OCTOBER'S** upcoming **ROME SUMMIT** on the **AMAZON REGION**, one stateside organization is hoping the legacy of a lesser-known saint - **Kateri Tekakwitha** - may help Catholics to realize the significance of indigenous people for the Church.

Bill Jacobs founded the Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Conservation Center in 2000 with a mission of inspiring Catholics to respond to today's ecological challenges on a local level. Along with his program director Kathleen Hoenke, they're trying to harness the momentum provided by Pope Francis's 2015 groundbreaking encyclical on the environment to fuel their cause.

That letter - **Laudato si'** - along with the Synod on the Amazon - now offer Jacobs and Hoenke the opportunity for a one-two punch: **Elevating the plight of indigenous people and the need for environmental action among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.**