

BICC

Bali International Catholic Chaplaincy

One of the ministries, which we need in the modern Church, but often do not find, is that of *“Welcomer”*. The reason it is not one of the traditional ministries is quite easy to understand – in the past, all those who came to Mass on a Sunday came from the nearby village or town and so everyone already knew everyone else. Nowadays, that is far from the case, even here in Bali, and so the new ministry of Welcomer is vital, for the Lord Jesus came not to give us a creed, but to found a group of friends, a family. We need a place where we feel at home, for where we are at home there we also find God – as an ancient hymn says, *“Where there is love and friendship – there also is God.”* The Parish we belong to is supposed to be such a home for us and I have been fortunate here in the Parish of SFX, Kuta, for I have been warmly welcomed, even though I could not speak Indonesian.

Language is one of the things, which helps bind us together as friends, for when we are able to understand each other, friendship can grow. Most of the people who come to Mass here at Kuta speak Indonesian, but there is a group of people – ex-pats and tourists - who do not. The Parish Priest here, Father Hady, tries very hard to help us “outsiders” feel we belong – he started one Sunday Mass in English and he also speaks a little in English at other Masses too. It was at his instigation and suggestion that I first began to think about an International “Chaplaincy” here in Bali - to help those Catholics, and others, who are not from Indonesia to feel really part of the parish community.

It began, in earnest, last Easter, when despite my doubts, Father Hady insisted that we had parallel Holy Week services in English and Indonesian and out of this beginning came a group of people, who formed a choir and became the nucleus of the Chaplaincy. Besides the Sunday Evening English Mass and choir, which are fast becoming a group of friends, we have started a weekly Bible Study in English and also a Thursday evening meditation Mass in English. We also plan to have a meeting in August to discuss other needs people may have. In this way, we hope that SFX will be a place, where people from all over the world will find a home and feel part of the parish, even though language difficulties may still persist.

As you know, since last September, I have been on sabbatical study leave here in Bali, but, in the course of this year, I have been drawn into the pastoral life of the parish and diocese – I say a weekly Mass in the prison and have managed to collect computers for the two Catholic orphanages here – and, I must admit, I have greatly enjoyed becoming involved. My sabbatical ends next month – so quick!! – and, in the future, I will be teaching theology at St Peter’s seminary in East Malaysia for two, two-month periods each year. However, that means that I still have eight months a year free and so, at the prompting of Father Hady, I asked the Bishop whether he would like me to work here as an International Chaplain and he welcomed me.

I “think” the Bishop has written to Mill Hill, my Society Headquarters, asking for me to be assigned here to Bali, but as I have not heard from them yet I am not sure. However, I am assuming that I will in future spend four months each year in my Borneo home and the rest of the time here in Bali – a place I am also coming to love. This means, though, that I am entering a “wobbly” stage of my life, for when I finish my sabbatical, this month, my funding also finishes. My financial support, up to now, has come from my Society, and some friends in UK, but not from the local Church here, which is not very wealthy, but that situation has to change if I am to stay here

for I need my living expenses provided for. Father Hady has suggested that we try an envelope support system. We have had envelopes printed and last Sunday, we – or rather I – launched the project. I am very good at raising funds for others, but was a touch embarrassed appealing for myself. However, after my talk at Mass in English, I tried talking in Indonesian and was surprised when I was given a loud applause at the end. Whether that was for the appeal or for my attempts at the language I do not know, but people seemed quite enthusiastic about taking envelopes at the end of Mass.

I began my priesthood in South East Asia – I was in Sarawak, East Malaysia, for 13 years immediately after my ordination – and when I had to leave, I asked the Lord if I could one day come back to what I had come to consider my home. So, I now wait to see whether his bringing me here to Bali, last year, is an answer to that prayer.

Diary

Last Sunday, at the end of Mass, I stood at the back of the church and said goodbye to people. I then walked back to the sacristy to change out of my vestments. There was a young Indonesian man kneeling in one of the benches and he got up to speak to me as I passed. He asked my prayers for his partner who had been diagnosed with a brain tumour and was waiting for an operation to see whether or not it is malignant. At first, I thought he was talking about his business partner, but I came to realise that he was talking about his gay partner. I was surprised that a young gay man, who did not know me, would have the confidence to come and share his worries and concerns like that. I must be doing something right!

This is now Monday evening, and I made the appeal last night, Sunday. Tonight, for supper, I did not have to cook anything for myself because two meals appeared at the house, cooked by people, who were at Mass last night. I have begun thinking that maybe, in the new house I shall be moving into, I may need a freezer!

God bless,

Terry