



MARIST MISSION CENTRE
Sydney, Australia

Celebrating 70 Years anniversary

What began as a nightmare in 1942-45 in the crucible of suffering and death during WW II, has become an organisation of enduring hope with the formation of the Marist Mission Centre.

Celebrating 70 years since their foundation, Fr Paul Sullivan, Executive Officer said that the idea of the Marist Mission Centre was born in the notorious and brutal Thai-Burma railway camps conducted by the Japanese Imperial army.

“The primary object of the Japanese Mission League, as it was known in 1949, was to assist Australian Marist Fathers in their efforts to share the Catholic faith especially compassion and forgiveness, to the Japanese,” said Fr Sullivan.

Fr Lionel Marsden was a Marist Chaplain to the 13th Australian General Hospital and captured in 1942. Fr Marsden spent four years as a prisoner ministering to the prisoners along the Thai-Burma Railway camps and made a promise to his fellow prisoners that if he survived the war and Japan was defeated, he would endeavour to go to Japan as a missionary to share his faith and speak of forgiveness and peace.

Raising money to assist Fr Marsden to go to Japan was understandably difficult due to the anti-Japanese sentiment after the war. However enough was raised to support the Mission.

“It is one of the ultimate stories of forgiveness”: as Fr Marsden returned to Japan to help those in need after the war had finished and was supported by former prisoners, war widows and their families.

Now, 70 years later the Marist Mission Centre are celebrating their anniversary with special guest, Marist Sister, Sr Lilibeth Cajés sm who is the team leader of a program for ‘Girls at Risk’ in Davao City, Philippines. Marist priest Fr Lionel Mechavez sm from the Balay Pasilungan Centre conducts a similar program for street boys in Davao City and will also be attending the anniversary celebrations.

“Our 70 year anniversary celebrations are very important as they recognise the generations of friends and donors who because of their help and work have produced such unexpected and extraordinary outcomes,” said Fr Sullivan.

Balay Banaag, or ‘House of Hope’ provides shelter, support, and education for girls at risk. These young girls come from families at risk and are very vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Balay Banaag offers them a future with dignity, hope, independence and an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. There are currently ten girls in the care of Balay Banaag aged between 6 and 18 years old. Most of the children do not know who their father is and many have suffered physical and emotional abuse because of their upbringing.

The Marist Mission Centre has a presence across different parts of Asia, Pacific, Africa and Latin America with the continuing aim of improving lives for impoverished and vulnerable adults and children.

Projects in the Bangladesh slums where the Marist Missionary Sisters are working; fish factories exploiting Burmese economic-refugees are ministered to by Marist Fathers; La Valla Education



Centre for children with major physical disabilities are run by the Marist Brothers in Cambodia – all demonstrating the scope and depth of the Marist Mission Centre.

“Our anniversary celebration pays tribute to the enduring legacy and the vision of one man, Fr. Lionel Marsden sm and the spirit of generosity of the first members of the Marist Japanese Mission League.

“It is an inspiration of the capacity of people to move from brutality and hatred to reconciliation, forgiveness and hope,” said Fr Sullivan.

The Marist Mission Centre is celebrating 70 years since their foundation on Wednesday May 1, 2019 from 10.30 to 12 noon and for more information contact 02 9844 2275.

To continue Fr Marsden’s vision of improving lives for impoverished and vulnerable adults and children people can donate at www.maristmissions.com .