

Jesu Ashram Re-opens

MIVAC became involved in the reconstruction of Jesu Ashram in 2005. Located at Dutch Bar, near Batticaloa, in Sri Lanka, the orphanage now shelters about 24 girls.

In 2004, there were two orphanages sheltering about 50 children, a result of over 20 years of ongoing civil war.



After the tsunami - The Shrine of Our Lady of Veilankanny, March, 2005

Brendan Boucher, a MIVAC member who was involved in our wells project at Tum Nub, and David Mariadason, a Australian Sri Lankan migrant living in Melbourne, visited Dutch Bar on behalf of MIVAC in March of 2005.



The day began with decoration. Here, a crepe paper outline of a cross goes up on

the wall. The men were local residents, and construction workers at Jesu Ashram.



At the top of the stairs stands Sister Helen, (centre) head of the Catholic religious order, The Messengers of Jesus.

Sister Helen is also the chairman of the Agro Human Welfare Development Society. The Society contracted with Benaal Construction Pty Ltd, a Sri Lankan company, to build Jesu Ashram.

The Benaal workers and management, the project Engineer Mr Thushyanthan Velmurugu and our project manager, Brendan Boucher all did much, much extra to complete the Ashram in less than a year from groundbreaking.

Given the current difficulties in Sri Lanka, that is an amazing accomplishment! No wonder the nuns are smiling! There are five nuns, total, in the Messengers of Jesus.



Nuns, visitors & residents stand on the upstairs verandah. The window shutters close over glassless windows with decorative grates. The garlands, made of blue and white plastic carry bags, stretch to the the ground.

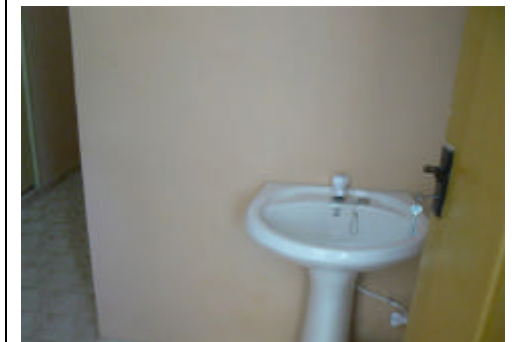


The view from the front of Jesu Ashram is southerly. A fish pond is visible beyond the fence. It provides food for locals. It is on

Catholic Church land administered by the Messengers of Jesus. In the distance is the estuary and a bridge that crosses from Kallady, where Dutch Bar is located, to Batticaloa City.



Inside the Ashram is a pleasant, sheltered central courtyard. The sleeping area and dining hall both open on to this space.



Tank water supplies the sink in the lavatory. There is no piped water supply in Dutch Bar, so clean water is at a premium.

The lavatory represents a major gain over the conditions which prevailed earlier.



The shower stalls are tiled, as are all the floors in this area. This is also a great improvement for the children at Dutch Bar. There are now three shower stalls and 3 toilets available for the girls. Some of them were living for more than a year under the roof of a patched-up chicken coop that survived the tsunami



The toilet is not what we are used to. Outdoor toilets will also remain in use. Coastal sewerage infrastructure was badly damaged by the tsunami.

The Big Day Begins



Father Joseph Mary arrives, with one of the boys from the boys' orphanage, nearby. Father Joseph survived the tsunami and wrote then of the dire events at Dutch Bar,



Brendan Boucher, our project Manager (centre), and a friend, chatting with Fr Joe.

Brendan was central to the rebuilding of Jesu Ashram. He gave generously of his free hours and days while working fulltime on Sri Lankan reconstruction for another NGO. Brendan's good judgement and outstanding commitment assured the project's success.



The welcome sign and nearby fence are decorated with cut leaves. This is a Hindu folkway.

The Dutch Bar community is a cultural melting pot. There are Sinhalese and Tamils, Christians and Hindus. There are also Burghers, who speak mainly English and whose ancestors are assimilated Portuguese, Dutch and Jewish migrants from earlier periods of colonialism.

Father Joseph is a well-known figure, with a vital role in this unique community.



A welcoming line awaits the guests of honour. The garlands are handmade, of tiny blossoms.



Caroline Del Court-Koenig, Ayubowan's representative, cuts the ribbon.

Caroline has a long and close association with Dutch Bar. She keeps close contact with both the nuns and some of the girls, including those she sponsors.

Like Brendan, Caroline fits her commitment to this project, on behalf of Ayubowan, into her spare hours and days of work and family life back in Holland.

This was Caroline's third post-tsunami visit to Dutch Bar.



An opening hymn is sung by the residents. Some verses are English, others in Tamil



Thank yous are given during the opening speech.



Guests and dignitaries, seated at the front, from left to right, are Father Joe, Sister Helen, Mr Velmuguru, the Engineer, and Mr Harry, the Contractor.



Brendan is given a St Christopher's medal in recognition of his key role in the planning and construction

Brendan helped identify the project in 2005. He successfully managed the project through its planning phase, up through June of 2006; then through its construction, to May 2007. Brendan's superb voluntary commitment assured the careful and successful use of MiVAC donations.

In addition to MiVAC members' individual donations, funds were donated by Sacred Heart School and _____ The Ashram also received a \$50,000 contribution from the Tasmanian State Government, \$10,000 from the Melbourne-based Cofield Foundation, and over \$80,000 from the Dutch charity Ayubowan, and its donors.



Sister Margaret stands by the grated window. A traditional Sri Lankan ceremonial oil lamp adds to the occasion.



Guests of honor, Brendan and Caroline. Their garlands took about a day each to make.



A play, presented by two of the Ashram residents. Plays such as these are integral to education in rural Sri Lanka, and carry far more status in the communities than they would in Australia.



After the celebration, Father Mary Joseph chats with a former resident of the old orphanage. Sister Margaret keeps in contact with former students and residents