



A story of accompaniment

For 75 years, Jesuit Mission Australia has sought to walk humbly with communities, responding in faith, love and justice wherever the need is greatest.



Transformation happens when people journey together, recognising God already present in every community and allowing that presence to guide the steps ahead. Like branches on a living vine, our mission grows when rooted in Christ and strengthened by a spirit of deep listening, compassion and solidarity.

As we mark this milestone of three-quarters of a century of service, we give thanks to the communities across Southeast Asia and India and around the world who have welcomed Jesuits and lay partners into their lives. This mission has never been defined only by projects

or programs. It is a way of seeing and serving, grounded in the belief that every life carries the imprint of God.

Walk with others

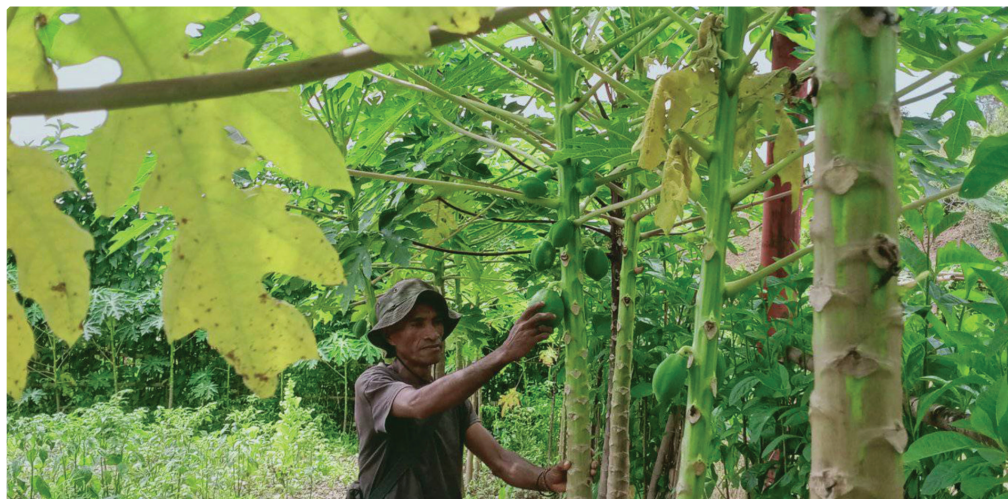
Pope Leo, in his 2025 exhortation *Dilexite*, writes, 'The love of Christ does not allow us to stand at a distance from human suffering'. His words reflect the heart of Ignatian spirituality: to walk with those on the margins and offer hope.

Jesuit Mission CEO Helen Forde sees this call to walk with those in need lived out every day through the generosity of the Australian Catholic community. 'There is always so much

Above: The First six Australian Jesuit Missionaries sent to Hazaribag, India, in 1951. **Right:** Fr Bob Billings SJ 1975 before being sent on mission to India. **Opposite page:** Francisco collecting his harvest.

need for the work of organisations like Jesuit Mission,' she says. 'What has changed is our world has become more complex... geopolitically things are challenging and that can affect the countries in which we work.' Climate disasters have intensified and conflict has destabilised communities. Yet despite these pressures, the call remains the same: to accompany, empower and love without imposing.

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For Helen, development begins by recognising what already exists within communities. ‘We are moving away from a needs-based approach to development towards a strengths-based approach that recognises the assets, skills and gifts already present within local communities.’

This shift honours the dignity of people who have endured hardship, people of wisdom and resilience whose potential is too often constrained by injustice and unequal systems.

This spirit comes to life in places like Timor-Leste and Vietnam, where Jesuits have worked with remote villages to bring clean water to families who once walked hours simply to fill a bucket. Young women proudly share how they helped design, build and now maintain their community water systems. Children became healthier. Women gained time for education and work.

Symbol of dignity

A simple water tank became a symbol of dignity and shared achievement, a reminder of what can flourish when people work together like branches drawing life from the same source.

Stories like these echo the long history of Jesuit Mission,

beginning with the first missionaries to Hazaribag, India, in 1951.

Since then, 55 Australian Jesuits have been missioned there, answering the call to accompany tribal communities.

Today only three Australian Jesuits remain in Hazaribag, including Fr Bob Billings SJ, who arrived in 1974. For 50 years he has walked alongside families, becoming fluent in Hindi and sharing their joys and struggles. ‘The people have always had a living faith that mattered. It was quite humbling to see,’ he reflects. ‘You cannot give without receiving. I believe I have received a hundredfold at the hands of such.’

Jesuit schools

Today, more than 25,000 students are educated each year in Jesuit schools developed in partnership with our Australian Jesuit Mission family across Hazaribag. What began as a single mission in India has since become a flourishing Province, with 12 parishes supporting nearly 700 villages through health care, livelihood programs, emergency assistance and education.

Fr Steve Curtin SJ, former director of Jesuit Mission and former Provincial of

Australia, recalls how early missionaries realised that their task was not simply to teach but to learn. ‘They thought they were bringing something to the people, but discovered that actually, they had a lot to learn first.’

That same truth continues to unfold today. When communities are trusted and supported, the rich soil of their own wisdom and resilience becomes the place where new growth emerges.

In Timor Leste, a long-running feeding program for children facing malnutrition has evolved into a thriving food security initiative shaped by the community. Francisco, a father of six from Hlalmeta, now leads 43 farming families. Through shared learning and accompaniment, families cultivate abundant crops, sell produce and save earnings for the future. A simple jar of market notes represents ownership, pride and the confidence that emerges when people are trusted to shape their own future.

Livelihood programs

Across Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam, similar transformations are unfolding. Women lead livelihood programs. Young people join microcredit groups. Communities



Left: Joyful students at Tenuahi school in India. **Right:** Sarom inspires other people in her community to take agency of their own life and not give up.

rebuild homes and strengthen support for vulnerable neighbours.

Sarom from Cambodia is one such story. Now aged 58, she lost her leg to a landmine at 15. She cares for her niece and five young children, supporting the household by selling fruit, snacks and second-hand clothing. Referred to the program in 2018, she received seed funding to strengthen her small business. 'With the extra support, I can provide for the children and feel more independent,' she says. Her income has grown, borrowing has eased and the children's school needs are more secure.

This spirit of accompaniment extends to Australia. Helen describes supporters as a 'movement of the heart'.

Their generosity grows from faith, compassion and a desire to respond quietly to the Gospel. Supporters recognise Jesuits from around the world as their companions in a shared mission.

Looking ahead, Jesuit Mission continues to strengthen local leadership, expand organisational capacity, explore new education models and responsibly embrace emerging technologies. Yet the heart of the mission will not change.

It remains, as Fr Steve says, God's work. 'We can only do what we can do,' he reflects. 'But Jesus invites us to join him in his mission. It is his mission. We are just sharing in it.'

Seventy-five years after those first Australian Jesuits set sail for India, this mission stretches across continents like a single living vine. Its roots remain deep, nourished by the Gospel and the faith of those who support it. The fruits are visible in every child educated, every woman empowered, every family with clean water and every community discovering its own strength.

And so the invitation endures. To be present. To listen first. To walk gently. To love generously.

To continue, as one humble community, becoming people for others. ●



JESUIT MISSION AUSTRALIA

Jesuit Mission Australia was established in 1951 and today operates as the international development organisation of the Australian Jesuit Province. Jesuit Mission Australia's community-led programs empower vulnerable communities around the world to liberate themselves from poverty and injustice.

Put your Faith in Action today, and join Jesuit Mission by making a donation today: <https://jesuitmission.org.au> or phone 02 8918 4109.

Zach Martorana has worked is Jesuit Mission Australia's communications coordinator. Passionate about aid and development, he is grateful for the opportunity to amplify the voices of marginalised communities.