

# *the promise*

News about our Covenant With the Poor

*“God keeps me going”  
says Emilia.*

*“If I did not have faith  
I do not think I could  
have survived.”*

**Emilia fled her country after a powerful and violent cult had killed her husband in front of her eyes. She had been attacked with a machete and then kidnapped. They had murdered her mother, father and brother, and she had lost all contact with her children. She had suffered further abuse and beatings while in captivity.**

Emilia managed to find her way to the UK to seek refuge and safety. But she was refused asylum, and was found distressed and desperate. Asylum seekers like Emilia are some of the most vulnerable people in our society - Emilia is severely disabled, doubly incontinent and suffers from depression.

Emilia was helped by **Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group (SWVG)** which, since its founding in 2001, has helped hundreds of other asylum seekers and refugees in similar circumstances in the



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Following Pope John Paul II's exhortation that we should maintain a "preferential option for the poor", the Covenant With the Poor process was instigated by Bishop Crispian as a diocesan initiative, to be carried out in and by the parishes. Our parish's Covenant promises:

*By this Covenant, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we bind ourselves to the experiences and needs of all who are poor and outcast from society, and pledge ourselves to actions that will help transform, relieve and prevent the conditions that afflict them.*

As this issue of *the promise* again shows, our Covenant addresses poverty in many forms and many places.

## **STOP PRESS**

A big, last minute thank you to the St. Peter's Youth Theatre, who presented a cheque for £1000 for the Covenant With the Poor from their production of the *Little Shop of Horrors*.

## **THANK YOU**

**SWVG**

**Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group**  
*Working with refugees and asylum seekers*

## SWVG - practical and emotional support



Southampton area, by offering practical and emotional support as they endure what can be one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Having fled for their lives, separated from family and friends and the familiarity of home, without the right to earn their living, often isolated and baffled by the bureaucracy of the UK asylum system, with little, inferior, or no legal advice at all, and left to the memories of the horrors they have left behind, it can be overwhelming and depressing for those who come to the UK seeking asylum. Many of SWVG's clients have been professionals with skills that they are eager to put to use to pay their way and to give something to this country they have come to, but this is yet another part of their identity that they must relinquish for the months and even years that it takes for their case to be decided.

As if this isn't enough, when an asylum seeker's claim has been refused (which, in 2009, 73% of them were), all government support is withdrawn. Refused asylum seekers become ineligible for accommodation, financial support, health care and education, and of course, are not permitted to work. Yet many cannot be repatriated because there are legal barriers for removals to their country of origin (for example, if the UK has deemed that country too unsafe for returns). How are they to live?

Many asylum seekers are refused because they have been unable in a short time to provide the required evidence (e.g. a medical report documenting torture scars, or evidence of belonging to an outlawed tribe). To lodge a fresh claim they need to gather this evidence and find a solicitor - while at the same time having no means

of survival, no safe place to sleep, no address for correspondence, no means of buying food, no money for telephone calls.

In the past year, 47 of SWVG's 81 clients have been destitute. Several of these have been so for up to four years due to delays in the asylum process.

To help destitute clients SWVG has a scheme called ASSIST. This offers their most desperate

clients a lifeline of £20 a week for food, and in some cases a small rented room. In the past year, 35 destitute asylum seekers have been helped through ASSIST. The ASSIST committee hopes to never have to turn a vulnerable client away but due to budget restraints and an increase in demand, many have had to make do with minimal assistance from us.

'This', says SWVG Coordinator Christine Knight, 'is why we are making this appeal to you. We hope you can help us to meet our goal of £9000 to provide 10 of our clients with 10 weeks of full ASSIST support (a small room and £20 a week for food) and an additional 10 clients with just the food money for 10 weeks. This would give 20 asylum seekers time to gather evidence, make a fresh well-substantiated claim, start to restore failing health or make contact with relatives, as well as to finally taste a bit of security and safety after being forced to survive on park benches and acquaintances' floors.

'With your help we can provide crucial support to some of our most vulnerable neighbours. People, like Emilia, who are seeking sanctuary and who show great courage and dignity. People we are proud to work with.

'SWVG is also looking for volunteers to visit and support asylum seekers, to help with fund-raising and events or to become part of our campaigning team. If you would like to help or if you would like more information please contact us.'

Phone: 07503 176350

Email: [admin@swvg-refugees.org.uk](mailto:admin@swvg-refugees.org.uk)

Web: [www.swvg-refugees.org.uk](http://www.swvg-refugees.org.uk)

# Mezzanines for Manila

Our Advent and Lent appeals were to support essential education and construction work for the poor in the Philippines by the Faithful Companions of Jesus. The FCJ Sisters had asked for £4500 to educate boys at the St. Joseph's Boys Home in Maasin City, and £1950 to build mezzanine floors for up to 30 families to improve the living conditions in their homes in Manila - a target, therefore, of £6450.



LEARNING and DEVELOPMENT CENTER  
SEC: CN200261253  
Area 6, Sitio Veterans, Bagong Silangan, 1119 Quezon City, Philippines

19<sup>th</sup> April, 2010

Reverend Canon Paul Townsend  
St Peter's Parish  
Winchester  
Hampshire

Dear Canon Townsend,

Greetings of Peace from Manila!

I am writing on behalf of the people here in Bagong Silangan to thank you most sincerely for the very generous donation we received from your Parish through the Covenant with the Poor Committee. We are overwhelmed by the kindness of your parishioners, and assure you that the money will enable us to provide better living conditions for many families.

The donation from St Peter's Parish will be used to make mezzanine floors. The homes of the people are very small. Many families are large - often eight or nine children, sometimes as many as twelve. The living conditions are therefore very cramped and there is no privacy. Mezzanine floors constructed of wood with a ladder for access would make a big difference to the families. Thanks to the generosity of the people of St Peter's Parish this work will soon begin. Men from the community with skills in building will be employed to do this work in conjunction with the beneficiaries. At the moment we are focusing our efforts on repairing the homes that were damaged by the floods last September. We hope to complete this work before the rains come in June. After that, work on the mezzanines will begin as it will not be hampered by the weather.

Once again I thank you and your parishioners for your great generosity. It is very moving for us to receive this support from people we have never met but who have a concern for the people here. The staff of the FCJ Center join me in sending you best wishes and the assurance of our prayers.

Yours sincerely,

*Paola Terroni fcj*

Paola Terroni FCJ  
Coordinator FCJ Center

However, through our CWP bucket collections, and with the help of some very generous individual donations (one sent direct to the Sisters), the total sum raised for this work has been a staggering **£13,740**. Opposite is a copy of a letter sent by FJC Sr Paola to Canon Paul.

And in a recent email, Sr Paola wrote,

'We hope to begin the mezzanines in early June. We have just built one model mezzanine and it looks wonderful. The house belongs to an elderly lady Manang Tita, living with her son who is fragile and not able to work. They are going to take in a blind man who lives on the street under a tarpaulin. The mezzanine will enable them to offer a home to Roddy as he is no longer able to manage on his own. Manag Tita is



his cousin and everyone is happy with the new arrangement.'

And just before *the promise* went to press,

'Here at last are the photos of the mezzanine. They are not wonderful as the house is small and it is hard to get the right angle. The Bon family is delighted and Roddy (seen in one of the photos) is so happy to have a clean safe place to live now.

Best wishes,

Paola fcj

# The Shehadeh Mohsen Diabetic Clinic, Abu Dis

**In October 2009, the Shehadeh Mohsen Diabetic Clinic opened at the Camden Clinic in Abu Dis, Palestine, thanks to a large donation from Our Covenant With the Poor. A special open day, accompanied by music and song, and dancing from the Dar Assadaqa dabkeh dancers, was held for diabetic patients who were invited to hear a talk about the causes and treatment of the disease.**

The aim of the clinic is to help diabetic patients from Abu Dis, Sawahreh, Aizariyeh and Sheikh Saed who are prevented from reaching the nearby Jerusalem hospitals by the Separation Wall. The clinic is named after Shehadeh Mohsen who was killed by Israeli soldiers when he tried to pass through a checkpoint on the Wall to reach his hospital appointment for diabetes.

The clinic offers the following free services:

- Medical checks by a diabetic specialist,
- On-going nursing care including bandaging wounds and changing bandages,
- Awareness training about diabetes,
- Appointments for patients with eye and bone doctors,
- Special medicine for diabetes (other than medicine available from the Health Ministry)

Dr Huda, one of the clinic's doctors, explained the need for the clinic,

'We established this clinic with two doctors and two nurses for the treatment and analysis of diabetic patients, after one patient was killed at a checkpoint. We started to take patients who for so-called 'security reasons' don't get permits from the Israelis to go to Jerusalem for medical treatment. One thing that makes me sad is the young people who have diabetes type 1, and need insulin all the time. I don't know why - one is 16, one is 15 - but the Israelis didn't give them permits to go to Jerusalem. We established the clinic four weeks ago, and the patients are continuously coming. We have to make more effort to help these patients to get good treatment, good education and good medicine.'

And the view of one Abu Dis resident:

'A lot of people suffer from diabetes. This clinic is very useful, especially the medicine provided and the treatment. Even for people who can go to Jerusalem this clinic helps them a lot to manage their diabetes. We hope that it will continue, and it will develop more, too.'

'Really, God bless you.'



**Open day for patients at the Shehadeh Mohsen Diabetic Clinic**