

Fly Away to Heaven Project

Father John Fowles, CCS

Introduction

The only way I can explain the Fly-Away-to-Heaven is to outline how the Highway to Heaven came about, that is, to go back to the need for a church to be built in Thurgoona.

As a newly ordained priest, I recall standing on the virgin soil where only gum trees and native scrub flourished and with Bishop Brennan's words ringing in my ears, "There you are; now build your Church." It was a rather daunting task, perhaps I was feeling a little like David facing Goliath. But sitting there looking at it was not getting the job done. Together, the religious community of the Confraternity of Christ the Priest and the Parishioners undertook a risk bigger than Texas, known as the "Highway to Heaven Truck Raffle".

The "Highway to Heaven" covered all parts of Australia, the priests and people took to the highways. It is through the generosity of many good people that the foundations of the Church were laid. The inspiration behind the "fly-a-thon" came from the desire to hand on this blessing gratefully received. An unexpected visitor came to the Parish, and spoke of the plight of the people of East Timor. Listening to this man I felt the need to respond with a personal commitment to help in some way, although I had no idea how.

It was from this that the "Fly Away to Heaven" initiative emerged. In some way, it is like the "rich man" of the Gospel and the Timorese people like the poor Lazarus. East Timor, being the poorest and neediest nation in the world today, we decided to centre our project around their needs. We live in a materialistic world in which we can lose ourselves and forget the need to give and help others that struggle for the basic necessities in life.

A fly-a-thon? That is what we can do!

Being a priest and pilot, and having an interest in building, the thought struck me of a "fly-a-thon". But how this was to come about, I had no idea? My license to fly had long expired and more to the point there was no plane! Yet I found myself pricing plane kits. God was going to have to work a miracle for this Project to get it on the runway!

God's Hand did come into play. In less than a week a friend simply asked, how much did I need for the kit. I said \$70,000, he said, "Ok go ahead and order it". This is how "Angel Wings" became a reality.

A Jabiru J400, build it yourself kit plane, became my Monday hobby for the next three and half years. It is unusual for any parish to operate an aircraft, but with thanks to the generosity of a local benefactor, we have two aeroplanes in our parish hangar. The generosity that the project has engendered confirms our opinion that Australians across the country want to identify with the people of East Timor in their struggle for independence and self reliance.

The Initiative

People find it hard to comprehend a priest building a plane, driving a truck around the country, and now flying a plane, but the message is clear. It is time to recognise the poorest nation in the world and our closest neighbour, East Timor.



Two religious priests, Father Joel Wallace and Father John Fowles of the Confraternity of Christ the Priest are pictured above with "Angel Wings" aircraft.

These priests much impressed 2006 Conference participants with their hospitality in the "church that looks and feels like a church" that with their community they constructed at Thurgoona in Albury, NSW (see "The Priest", May 2007, pages 19-20). Now these CCS priests again impress with their new project (see article).

The Fly Away to Heaven will commence a national fly-a-thon on 1st May 2008. It is a flight of goodwill that has the potential to inspire generosity among Australians allowing them to go beyond themselves by way of service.

The Fly-a-thon Flight Plan has twelve legs. Pilots and flying friends are invited to join all legs or as many as they choose. There is a stipulated time frame for this flight and all participants are required to cover their flight costs and carry the logo of their sponsor. Sponsorship of \$1,000 is needed to join our flight and must raise this by 20th April, 2008. So with a 'Lets go' attitude, go get your wings and come fly with me.

Angel Wings Takes to the Sky

After three and a half years of being locked up in the Parish "Hanger" this little Angel was about to take to the skies. With the words of our motto "On the Wing of a Prayer" in my mind I started up the engine and headed down the runway on our maiden flight.

With this mission of "the gift of giving" little Angel Wings gave it all she had. Winging our way north amongst the clouds Angel Wings was returning to the nest, the home of the Jabiru, Bundaberg, Southern Queensland. Departing from the winter weather of Wangaratta, we soon found ourselves in clearer skies tracking north for arrival finally at Bundaberg's, Wide Bay Airshow. It seemed every pilot with his wings was lining up for a landing. I was soon ushered into a circuit pattern that included the "Roulettes" along with a variety of every other form of flying machine. Everything with wings was there. Was this a "welcome mat" being put out?.. or was this a "war zone"? Weaving in and out, finally, Angel Wings got through the traffic and was cleared to land. Then with the thunder of aircraft all around, Angel Wings touched the ground.

The next two days Angel Wings was proudly on display. At the Air Show many people showed interest in the Fly Away to Heaven Project while our theme song "Earth Angel's Care" touched their hearts. How encouraging it was to see people

respond with surprise and joy when they discovered what our good will flight for the people of East Timor was about.

When the noise began to settle and the last of the crowd was drifting out the gate, we taxied into the service bay where an adjustment or two had to be made. Then again, "Angel Wings" was put to the test. That was fine with me, until the pilot started to do "roll-overs" and manoeuvres I knew nothing about. The Pilot said, "She's right Father, just hang on! ... hasn't she got *Angel Wings*?" Well, it was time to head for home having spent time among the big flyers, maybe not by choice, but Angel Wings certainly proved a winner among our many new friends in the Sunshine State.

Fly Away To Heaven Goes To Henty Field Days

With only a brief respite, Angel Wings' next flight was the Henty Field Day, following in the path of the Highway to Heaven Trucks where she met the people of the Riverina. A lot of good people showed great interest in the "Fly Away to Heaven" Project. Having the aircraft "Angel Wings" on display gave people the opportunity to take photographs of their children with little Angel Wings while coming to appreciate the concept of the "Fly-away-to-Heaven".

Comments made by adults were very different to the children. "You wouldn't get me in that Father", but the children were very keen to become instant pilots, "Start her up Father" they asked, "Let's fly on Angel Wings". At the Henty Field Day, people gather year in and year out. The Farmers and their families come from near and far to celebrate three days of fun and festival. Taking a break from the drought stricken farmland, the farmers enjoyed "Angel Wings" and sang along with the Song of "Earth Angels Care".

Fly Away to Heaven goes to America

"On the Wing of a Prayer" Angel Wings has been out and about making known this message of good will, but in our next flight our little Angel was to be left safely at home. With short notice I found myself heading off to America, on a flight from Albury to Alabama, USA. This flight was very different to Bundaberg in Angel Wings. On this flight I found myself in the hands of God! What was He conspiring to bring about next? How could this retreat benefit the "Fly Away to Heaven" I thought? Then while flying across the Pacific the obvious became apparent. Birmingham, Alabama is the home of EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network), which of course was why I was really going! This was to give us world wide television coverage.

Naturally enough this was to give me the golden opportunity to talk about the "Fly Away to Heaven" in connection with World Youth Day 2008 with an interview on "Life On The Rock". With keen interest the interviewer asked me how was Australia preparing for World Youth Day? He was surprised to hear all about the "Fly Away to Heaven" Project with its aims and goals of bringing out young people from East Timor to join with other youths to share the joy of WYD08.

A visit with the Nuns at Our Lady of the Angels Monastery where I met with Mother Angelica, a Franciscan Nun, whose extraordinary work of establishing an international Television Network that beams the Catholic faith into homes through the world is probably one of the great achievements of our age. What a great pleasure it was to be in the presence of such a saintly nun, who greeted me warmly. God certainly did unfold his plan!

Fair Dinkum Mate! "Going Outback!"

People from all over the world come to visit the Australian Outback. It is the red heart of our Country where people find the "True Aussie" with the generous heart. The Fly Away to Heaven Project appeals to this heart by seeking sponsorship from "the Outback".

We are inviting everyone to come on board this wonderful Project in aid of the people of East Timor through purchasing our "Earth Angels Care" theme song. This CD gives voice to our commitment to raise money to distribute towards the basic essential human needs like food, water and hygiene, health supplies, and shelter.

"Earth Angels Care" with all its sales is bringing ten young people from East Timor to World Youth Day in Sydney 2008. To these people of East Timor attending such an event would only be a dream, but our Project is making this a reality. As our theme song reminds us, "miracles can happen when earth angels care".

Another aspect of the Fly Away to Heaven Project is aimed at all you pilots! We are "Calling All Pilots", to go get your wings and join our mission, a mission that will take you around Australia in a fun loving flight in aid of the people of East Timor. There is no beating about the bush with this one, mate! The Fly Away to Heaven project is calling every "fair dinkum Aussie" to help us keep the "billy boiling" in this worthy cause. So, if your dare, come fly with us." Let's take "Angel Wings" across the Outback.

Baguia Orphanage

The purpose of the Fly-a-thon is aimed to raise funds for projects to assist the orphans in remote villages like Baguia. There are an incredible number of orphan children in East Timor, like this one situated high up on the side of Mt. Matebain in Baguia. From Larga, it is a four hour drive in an open truck, standing holding on to overhead frame, sharing the floor space with pigs, chickens, bags of rice, building materials, with at least thirty people crammed together. When we eventually arrive at the orphanage in Baguia, we find there over fifty children living in the poorest of poor conditions. Homes are mostly built from bamboo having a thatched roof. Rice is the main food and grown in the lower areas, while higher up the mountain corn and beans are grown. People in Baguia have no vehicles only a few motor bikes. The children walk to school or market places on foot. Transport to Dili can take up to 7 hours because the tracks are so rough.

"Baguia" Orphanage has around 50 boys and girls ranging from 6-16 years old. These children are housed into two dormitories approximately 4 by 4 meters. The small windows and doors do not let in much fresh air or natural light, so it can get very hot and stuffy inside. Having no window fly screens, makes these dormitories a high risk for Malaria, Tuberculosis and other tropical diseases. The sparse dining room, with one line of tables down the centre and chairs around the walls are where the children after grace, happily eat their meals with their plates upon their knees. The menu is as follows:

Breakfast: Plain boiled rice with bean soup on top, plus small piece of bread.

Lunch: As above, minus the bread.

Dinner: As above. (Meat is added to dinner about once a month: usually boiled chicken or pork.)

In the kitchen children chop wood and build an open fire for the cooking of rice and beans in two huge saucepans. Serving from the saucepan, the children place the food onto small plates for eating in the dining room. Their water supply is gravity fed through a pipe from a spring higher up the mountain that leads into an open tank in the kitchen. This water is bailed out in an old saucepan and used for all purposes. Electricity from the town generator (when working) is from 7pm to 11pm. Communications is non-existent. Transport is via open truck and operates twice daily, six days a week. The Pre-natal clinic is open daily to accommodate the mothers to be. Other medical and Dental services are extremely limited.

All work in and around the orphanage is carried out by the children. Care and supervision are in the hands of two girls aged 18 years and 21 years. These two girls are paid a very low wage approximately \$5.00 per week. The cost per child per day is approximately \$US\$1.

How can we help?

1. Assist with the bread program (\$35 will employ five women and children to bake bread for eight days breakfast for fifty children living in Baguia's orphanage.)
2. Renovations to rooms and kitchen facility at the Orphanage.
3. Sporting goods such as volleyballs, soccer and basketballs are needed.
4. Educational items, blackboards, desks, writing materials etc.
5. Children's clothes are another basic need along with cleaning.

Projects

The Fly Away to Heaven Project intends to support the Orphanage of Baguia.

1. Renovations to the run down damp buildings of the Orphanage will be the first Project of the Fly Away to Heaven.
2. Bread for Orphanage Breakfast program in support of food and nutrition.

(FATH is already assisting the program.)

3. Education Program.
4. Health and Hygiene.

Despite the difficulties that face of people of Baguia are very warm and friendly and have a great respect for both their local and Timorese identity. The Fly Away to Heaven Committee thanks you for your time and invites you to support our cause.

The Gift of Giving

Jacque Garnier, a Fly Away to Heaven team member, shares a story of his own experience in Baguia. The children plead with Fr Marcos to go home for Christmas. But Fr Marcos knows that this Orphanage is their home. By way of consolation they were given the opportunity to visit a large town which gave them great excitement. Jacque was going to buy them a present for Christmas.

They all climbed aboard the ute and set off to buy the present Jacque promised. After hours of rough roads and many pit stops the children arrived at Dili. The children gathered together and a young boy smiling behind his hand asked for a bike. The young lad was told to go and pick out a bike. He came back with a bike to suit a 14 year old. "What about us little kids?" asked a tiny child? So, Jacque decided to buy another bike with training wheels for the younger children. The shopkeeper was so impressed with Jacque's generosity that he decided to throw



Children of Baguia Orphanage in Timor Leste (East Timor) whom Father Fowles CCS is assisting with his "Fly Away to Heaven" Project.

another bike in for the children with no cost. On returning to the Orphanage, the children were delighted, there were screams of joy and tears of happiness. Not one bike, not two but three! The children's joy was overwhelming but nothing to compare with the joy in Jacque's heart. Is it any wonder why Jacque's heart is with these children so full of joy in East Timor. Like Jacque, we too, can have this same joy when we come together in our one off 'goodwill' flight for the poor and needy.

Contributions to "Fly Away To Heaven" Project can be made to:

PO Box 110, Lavington NSW 2641

Visit our Website: www.flyawaytoheaven.org.au

The challenge of joining our good will flight of outreach to the many generous Australians, will be one that through this gift of giving you will receive back a hundredfold! So down with your pens, hang up your overalls, it is time for you to join our flight and have some fun.

Fly Away to Heaven Prayer Crusade

It is impossible to think that a Project undertaken without prayer is going to be successful. The Fly Away to Heaven Project knows only too well the necessity of prayer to keep this flight in aid of the people of East Timor on course. To be successful and achieve a generous response to the gift of giving a Prayer Crusade for God's blessings has been given top priority for the Fly Away to Heaven Project.

The Fly Away to Heaven Project has instigated a Prayer Crusade throughout the Dioceses of Australia. In doing so, the Project has opened up an opportunity for people throughout Australia to unite together by way of placing their signatures with their prayer commitment in a beautiful book. This book will be presented to our Holy Father Pope Benedict at World Youth Day.

Our "Goodwill" flight will inspire others to take up the challenge for the poor and needy, while at the same time, it will revitalise our own commitment to the Christian way of life. By taking part in our Prayer Crusade, we believe many will go further in their efforts to express goodness and generosity, ideals which we believe all people aspire to. The Prayer Crusade seeking God's protection for World Youth Day 2008 and the safety of all international pilgrims travelling to Australia is a way that we can spiritually become one, uniting us together to celebrate this wonderful event.

I thank you all for your time and trust that you will assist us on our flight to ease the burden of poverty put on the people of East Timor. We would like the opportunity to present our project at your Parish. To make these arrangements please contact us on flyawaytoheaven@hotmail.com or Phone: 02 6043 2222. Fax 02 6043 2224.

