



To the Parish Community of St. Joseph Church,

A whole year finished! For those of you who are students or teachers, you know the joy of the end of the academic year. This first year of studies was for me a really great one. We Dominicans in St. Louis are settling in to our new home very nicely, and I find myself at peace living in community and focusing on studies. With final exams and commencement activities behind me, I'm now looking ahead to the coming months.

During the summer, the student brothers are usually sent out to other Dominican communities to gain some "real life" experience outside of formal studies. In our first year, it is the current practice in my province for us to be assigned to a social justice experience, often in another country. And that is exactly what I'm preparing for this summer!

On May 23, I'll be leaving for a two week program with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) called the Global Fellows Program. You're probably familiar with the CRS Rice Bowl program, but they do many other programs to serve those suffering from hunger, poverty, disease, and violence in developing countries and to help

build awareness and solidarity among Catholics back in the U.S. The Global Fellows Program is an immersion program for priests, deacons, brothers, and seminarians to give them a chance to experience first-hand what CRS is doing overseas and to then come back home and preach for CRS. This year's trip is to the country of East Timor, and I'll be joined by three of my classmates and five other priests and deacons from around the U.S.

After a two-day orientation with CRS in New York City, we'll all head out for a *long* series of flights to get us to Dili, the capital of East Timor. We'll be staying in the country for about 9 days, touring the various locations where CRS works and meeting with church and government officials to learn about what has contributed to the conditions of poverty in East Timor and what's being done (and can be done) to help.

In case you haven't heard of East Timor before, don't feel too bad—I had to look it up too at first! East Timor is a small country about the size of Connecticut, occupying part of an island in Southeast Asia, north of Australia. This country has been occupied by other nations and has been plagued by poverty and war since the arrival of European explorers in the 16th century. With the help of the UN, East Timor finally became independent (from Indonesia) in 2002. Under their first elected government, the country was very unstable and without the political and economic infrastructure they needed to rebuild their decimated country. Just last month, they peacefully elected a new president, and are eager to find solutions to the many problems the nation faces. Among its close to 1 million citizens, about half are illiterate, nearly 70% are unemployed or underemployed, and life expectancy is only 62 years. The country is almost entirely Catholic, and many bishops and other religious leaders have helped bring peace and stability to the country. There's a lot to do, and a lot that CRS is doing to help, and I'm very excited to experience what is happening there.

After the CRS immersion program, I'll be continuing on with another brother to the Philippines. The Dominican Friars have been in the Philippines for several centuries, and continue to be a strong presence there—you may know the famous University of Santo Tomas founded by the Dominicans in 1611. We'll be staying in various houses in Metro Manila, getting to know the ministries the friars are doing, and taking part ourselves in ministry to the poor. We'll get to know the Filipino student brothers, get involved in ministry at one of the Dominican parishes, spend a few days living with poor families, take part in ministry to lepers, and, of course, do a little sightseeing. It's going to be an exciting and challenging time I'm sure, and I can't wait!

At the end of July, I'll travel back to the States and spend a few days getting reoriented in Saint Louis. Then I'll be back home in Ohio for a few weeks in August for a nice visit. Finally, summer will be over, and I'll return to Saint Louis for another year of full time graduate studies. I'm looking forward to the Fall semester, with some more hands-on classes in preaching and supervised ministry.

As you can tell, we Dominicans keep busy! I'm truly blessed to have all these incredible opportunities to see the larger Church and world, and to help our brothers and sisters who do not have the good things we enjoy here. I look forward to being back home and sharing my experiences with you. I ask for your ongoing prayers for me and all my brothers who will be traveling and doing ministry this summer. I will be doing the same for you.



God Bless,
Br. James-Peter Trares, OP