

NEWS FROM KABANKALAN

The community welcomed Jim at the end of July. Kabankalan staged a 3 day festival at the same time. This was for 14th Charter Day (14 years since Kabankalan was declared a city) and not for Jim's arrival. Rod and John were thrilled to have him arrive to join them. They had been waiting for over a year for someone else to arrive and stay. Both met Jim at the airport and accompanied him back to the house – a drive of over 2 hrs, not counting a lunch break.

Rod continues with his work as Chair of the Diocesan Education Commission. This involves visits to many schools for board meetings, meetings with the principal and staff at the schools and inspection tours. There are 19 high and elementary schools and a number of pre-schools and colleges throughout the diocese. As the parish priests are the directors of the local schools, Rod has much contact with these priests. Jim has accompanied Rod on many of these visits during the last month as a means of getting to know the diocese, the people and the issues surrounding education here.

The brothers have become involved with the Anawim Foundation which facilitates the operation of a house for deaf students. These students attend the regular public schools. Miladdie Chia is a teacher of the deaf students and the force behind Anawim. As a means of attempting to promote financial independence, Rod has facilitated the setting up of a goat farm. This has been many months coming to reality. It is situated on an old fish farm in Su-ay, just north



Goat shed and garden



Goats and handlers in the shed

of Kabankalan. The farm is being run by 3 deaf youth at present, with advice from a lecturer from the Negros State College of Agriculture and overseen by Rod. They have 8 young female goats at present. The plan is to establish a large enough herd to breed goats for sale as meat. Much is still to be done, with Bebot, the carpenter, building goat houses and a hut for young men to live in.

John returned home for the death and funeral of his sister, Jeanette, in early August. This left Jim to fill in at the ALS (Alternative Learning Scheme) school in Camugao, a barangay across the river. A quick entry into teaching high school maths to these youth. The other staff, Ma'am Gigi and Ma'am Angie, was very helpful in introducing Jim to the schedule and the youth. With exams coming up in early October, there are around 14 youth who attend most days, hoping to learn enough to pass the high school exam. This will allow them to go to further training or college if they wish. With the arrival of Jim, the



ALS class at Camugao

maths class has been split into those who are more advanced and those who are slower, hopefully giving all a better chance of success. The exam is a 5 hr paper, covering 5 subject areas and an essay (no break in this time). The walk to Camugao involves crossing the river on the hanging bridge – a suspension footbridge that sways and the decking twists to one side. Not for the faint hearted or those less stable on their feet. This is more so when the river is in flood as it has been in recent days.



Camugao hanging bridge

John continues his work in providing the basic requirements for many poorer students in a number of the public schools in the area. With the help of Gigi and Angie, he visits schools and distribute what is needed to the identified students. Without this, many would drop out of school or not attend at all. Many still do not attend for a variety of reasons. The Saturday morning library service for children of the area continues. Though numbers borrowing books

is not strong, there are a consistent number each day.

A contingent from Nudgee College came for a week's immersion experience during their July holidays. Jim went with Nelson, the bus driver, to welcome the staff and students to Negros Occidental. He was surprised to be greeted by 2 staff with whom he worked back in the 80's. Also to discover that there were 2 students whose fathers he taught long ago. The 14 students and 4 staff went to some schools in the diocese – Cauayan, Candoni, Magbello, Inayuan and Ilog high schools. It was our pleasure to host them to lunch at our house twice during their time here. The students also spent a couple of hours spreading gravel to repair the road into the Bishop's house and the Anawim house. The Anawim children put on a concert for the visitors at the end of the day. There was much laughter and enjoyment on both sides.

Upon John's return, we had Fr Brian Gore over to celebrate mass in the house and share a meal with the community. One major change around the house has been the pruning back to ground level of the bougainvillea on the back fence. John reluctantly agreed that they were not flowering as he had hoped and that it be best to take them out. Jim with the help of Ronnie, the yardman, accomplished the task – with some discomfort. Now there are plenty of leaves to be turned into compost and branches burnt.

Many poorer people come seeking help from the brothers. This is an on-going issue with many regulars coming every week. For many it is a small amount of money asked for, but others it may be a drink of water and some food. As we are seen by many as 'the rich white people' there is a presumption that we can help all and will help all. Communication between us as to whom we help each occasion is important.

We celebrate this week National Heroes Day and the end of Ramadan with public holidays, and prepare for the coming of Adelaide CBC and Aquinas College, Perth, in the coming months.

Rod, John & Jim