

Dear Carmelite family,

I want to thank you for believing in my children, for giving them the chance to go to school, and to become someone.



My name is Isabel de Jesus. I don't know how old I am. I forget as I don't really celebrate my birthday. I was born in a village in Suai, Covalima. I still live here as it is my family's land and I am responsible for looking after it as the eldest child.

My husband and I are farmers. We live a simple life. We have land for growing vegetables like cassava, eggplant, corn, mung beans, potatoes. We also grow papaya and bananas. We have some chickens.

In the past, my husband was able to earn money by working on other peoples' farms, especially during harvest time or when they needed to clear land to use for agriculture. We also used to chop wood for cooking and selling. My husband is a catechist in the church. We love the church and often help at our parish.

However, we are both old now, so we are not able to work so much anymore.

I have eight children and five grandchildren. All my grandchildren are girls. Two of my grandchildren live with me and the other three live with their parents in Aileu.

Of my eight children, two of them joined the church. I'm very proud of them. My son Donato is a Carmelite Brother and his sister a Carmelite Sister.



The Carmelites are very important to us in this family. We love the Carmelites very much and they also love us. They have helped my children go to school, learn to read and write, and now they help others in their time of need.

Of my other six children, two are married, one lives with me, one works at the Carmelite community in Hera helping with the cooking,

and Maria, my youngest is studying in Dili.

It's because of you that my children have been able to go to school, to get an education. We never had enough money to be able to pay for their education. But I always made sure that my children understood that an education is important. That it could change their lives.



I never went to school. I don't know about reading and writing, but I know about looking after the land, my culture and my family.

I play a special role in my family because I am the eldest daughter. I am responsible for looking after our family's sacred house (uma lulik). It is where we keep our family's treasured possessions that are handed down from one generation to the next. Our culture is very important to us. I have taught all my children about our culture.

In 1999 when there was lots of violence after the referendum for independence, we all had to run away to save ourselves. When this happened, I took the family's sacred possessions with me to protect them. Then when it was safe I brought them back and returned them to the sacred house.

In the past I used to weave tais (traditional Timorese cloth), but now my eyes are bad and I can't see properly. I never made tais to sell. I made tais for our family's traditional ceremonies and for funerals and weddings. Tais is an important part of our culture. I also know how to weave baskets and mats that we use to sit on.



I am very proud of all of my children. And I am so thankful for you. It's your support that has helped my children receive an education. They have led a simple life in the village, but because of you, they are now achieving something great.

Thank you Carmelite family. Thank you for supporting so many children in Timor-Leste.

Isabel de Jesus