

# ACTS' mission trips to Cambodia in December was the 'realisation of a dream'



The new Don Bosco High School in Teuk Thla looms impressively with a statue of her patron standing watch at the entrance.



Governor of Phnom Penh and Battambang, Mr Pa Socheatvong, (third from right) Dr John Lee, founder of ACTS, (in black blazer) and current Salesian Provincial Superior, Sr Teresita Garcia entering the new hall of the Don Bosco High School for the inauguration ceremony.

While 350 ACTS (A Call to Share) participants were on their annual mission trip to Phnom Penh from Dec 14-20, some got the chance to witness the inauguration of the Don Bosco High School in Teuk Thla, Cambodia, on Dec 15.

The high school was constructed as ACTS wanted to help the Salesian Sisters build a safe and enriching environment for students, as well as to expand it and create a kindergarten, a primary and secondary school, and the latest addition, a high school.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by guest-of-honour, His Excellency Pa Socheatvong, Governor of Phnom Penh and Battambang. Representatives from the major donors, several bishops of Phnom Penh and Battambang,

priests, Religious and officials from various ministries also attended the inauguration.

ACTS participants played a huge part by securing the free services of a Singaporean engineer and quality surveyor to supervise the construction of the new high school.

The group which started 10 years ago, also raised more than \$1 million through private fundraising efforts, and secured donations from CHARIS and Dutch Foundation Porticus – all of which went into the construction of the \$1.8 million building.

During the ceremony, Dr Damian Png, chairman of ACTS, received a government medal on behalf of ACTS.

The highlight of the ceremony was when the school choir sang You Raise Me Up, which moved

*The group raised over a million dollars through private fundraising efforts to build the school.*

participants to tears.

“The inauguration of the high school was the realisation of a dream. One which started six years ago and the fruit of the efforts of hundred of selfless ACTS volunteers and friends,” shared ACTS founder, Dr John Lee.

The idea to build a school came when ACTS approached the former Salesian Provincial Superior, Sr Sarah Garcia, and the Salesian Sisters in 2008. In 2013, the Don Bosco High

School welcomed its first batch of female students and their lessons were held in the elementary school. Groundbreaking took place in April, and the cornerstone was laid in September that year.

Lessons began in the new high school in October 2014. The high school run by the Salesian Sisters has 24 classrooms, with each room able to hold 40 students.

The new school comes with a science laboratory, a home economics hall, a music room, a computer lab and a canteen.

Meanwhile, during the mission trip led by spiritual director Dominican Fr David Garcia, the ACTS education team conducted enrichment activities and lessons on financial literacy, interview skills and personal grooming for

## More than 100 in Battambang outreach

It was the first time that a large group of 118 ACTS volunteers, led by spiritual director Fr Jovita Cyprian Ho, travelled to Battambang Prefecture in northwestern Cambodia from Dec 6-13 last year to do mission work.

Previously, about 30 ACTS volunteers went there annually.

The volunteers, who also included non-Catholics, formed various teams, and set out to parishes in five different places – Battambang and nearby villages in Nikum, Crab Viel, Tahen and Chomnaom.

In all five places, ACTS kindergarten teams did arts and crafts and other activities with the children, while the various ACTS work teams assisted in painting work. In Battambang, the team paint-

ed the parish church and Our Lady's grotto; in Nikum, they painted a kindergarten playground set and set up the Stations of the Cross within a parish; in Crab Viel, they painted a dental hygiene mural; in Tahen, they painted toilets and shoeracks, and in Chomnaom, they painted the church's dining hall.

Some ACTS volunteers also taught catechism lessons, conducted motivational talks and gave English and dance lessons.

To spread the Christmas cheer, the ACTS Obrum team worked with Arrupe Centre, which helps people with disabilities receive education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

As part of their outreach mission, the ACTS team went to re-



Kindergarten kids playing with ACTS volunteers in Nikum during a lesson on colours.

note places and celebrated Christmas with children from farming communities in Pun Peas, Kbal

Krohey and Ratanakmondul. They also visited a parish in Tapung to examine the roof of

the church and see if repairs were needed.

Another team comprising doctors and medical students gave health talks in parishes and villages in Battambang.

Rice and other basic food items were distributed to poor families and 700 goodie bags comprising a T-shirt, sweets, toys and shoes were handed out to the children.

“The children reminded me of how lucky I am, and [that] I should appreciate the life I am living,” wrote an ACTS participant in a feedback form.

Another wrote: “The warm hospitality that we [ACTS volunteers] received taught me humility and generosity.”  CONTRIBUTED BY: TRAZIE YAP