

## PHILIPPINE PROVINCE OF CEBÚ

Delegation Indonesia-Timor

PO Box 3411

Jakarta Pusat - Indonesia

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Lospalos-East Timur, June 7, 1992



Dear Confreres,

The Lord has once again visited us; this time, to take for Himself the soul of our beloved

**Fr. Ernesto R. Santos,**

at the age of 44, with 16 years as a priest and 25 as a Salesian.

He passed away suddenly three days ago, on the 4th of June, at 8.30 pm. When discovered, he was still alive but unconscious, due to a thrombosis caused by very high blood pressure. The other confrere priest, Fr. A. Cervantes, who usually used to be away visiting the villages, was by a special coincidence present, thus he was able to administer the Extreme Unction and the "*Absolutio in articulo mortis*."

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Fr. Ernie was not a man of good health and he was quite aware of it. Since he was appointed rector and parish priest of the community of Lospalos, he had been committing himself with great dedication to many responsibilities, sometimes even stretching beyond what his health would allow. In fact, during his last days, he had been driving himself, visiting the different mission stations of the parish. On that fatal day, he felt very tired and wanted to have a few minutes rest before celebrating the usual evening Mass for the parishioners. When he failed to turn up for the Mass, his own brother, Bro. Ephrem, who had come to Lospalos from Fatumaca, knocked at Fr. Ernie's door and called out. He received a weak "Yes " response. Bro. Ephrem, presuming that Fr. Ernie was tired and resting, asked Fr. Cervantes to say the Mass. When Fr. Ernie didn't appear for the Evening Prayers and Supper, the other confreres suspected something wrong and knocked at the door. As there was no response, Bro. Ephrem entered the room through the window and found Fr. Ernie lying on the floor, still breathing but unconscious. Immediately a doctor was called from the hospital just about 50 metres away. All his efforts were of no avail and after a few minutes Fr. Ernie was declared dead.

The news spread immediately and an uninterrupted succession of people, including the high civil officials of the town, came to pay their respects and to pray for Fr. Ernie. By early morning the following day, nearly all the mission stations of the parish were informed of the sad news and people kept pouring in with prayers and tears, to pay their last respects to their beloved father. Our confrere Msgr. Carlos Felipe Belo arrived the following day from Dili and said the Mass for the repose of Fr. Ernie. And I myself too was able to arrive the same day from Jakarta. Confreres from the other Salesian Communities of Fuiloro, Laga, Baucau, Fatamuca, Venilale and Dili were all present, along with the communities of the FMA's. The funeral Mass was on the 6th at 3 : 30. The Funeral Mass and the burial service were presided by the Vicar General of the Diocese, Msgr. Jose Antonio da Costa. Other diocesan priests, religious of congregations of men and women, especially the Canossian Sisters who work hand in hand with the Salesians in Lospalos, with their provincial Mother Carla Manzoni, the civil and military authorities, the past pupils with their president from Dili, and the christian communities from the villages led by their respective catechists, all thronged to Lospalos to offer their last respects and fervent prayers for Fr. Ernie. From the moment of his death to his burial, there was unceasing succession of prayers being organized by the christians themselves. To all of them, I would like, through this letter, to express the most sincere gratitude of the bereaved relatives and Salesians, for their effective and consoling company in these days of sorrow.

The solemn funeral Mass was in the open and was attended by more than six thousand christians. The otherwise unpredictable weather also paid its tribute to Fr. Ernie by withholding its tears until soon after the burial. Fr. Ernie has been laid to rest in the tomb built near the entrance to the parish church. Everyone who will enter the church will remember him and he too will see them and bless them from heaven. The Christians of Lospalos were relieved (and happy) when they heard that the family of Fr. Ernie had no objections to have him buried in Timor. Their reasoning was that, "Since Fr. Ernie came to work for us, he must also stay with us !" In fact, an extract from their farewell message, read : *"Like our Lord who said, 'I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much and die there, in order to give life to the world' also Fr. Ernie said, 'I must go to Timor and suffer and die so that ..... we may all have life'!"*

From the moment of his first appointment in Timor, on 19th March 1986, Fr. Ernie has always been working in this mission centre of Lospalos. Since June 5, 1991 he was Rector and Parish Priest, very well known and loved by everyone especially the orphans who feel deeply the demise of their beloved father.

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Fr. Ernesto R. Santos was born on 1st February 1948, in Coron (Palawan) - the Philippines, where his family was stationed because of the assignment of his father, Engr. Emilio Santos. He was the third in the family of 13 children, four of whom are presently in the Salesian Congregation, offered by the good



parents. His first contact with the Salesians was in Mandaluyong, Manila, where he attended the primary school. After these years, he went to the aspirantate in Bacolor (1962-1966). Later on, after considering about his vocation, he joined the Novitiate (1966-1967). And after his Philosophy studies in Canlubang (1967-1970), he did his practical training in the Juniorate in Bacolor (1970-1972). He finished his Theology in Paranaque and was ordained priest in Cebú in 1976.

His first assignment was assistant parish priest in Tondo. Fr. Ernie showed his zeal as coordinator of the many organizations in that popular centre. With his amiable character and delicate manners, he gained the trust and the confidence of many people. Although quite young, he was elected and appointed Vicar Forane in a district of several parishes in the archdiocese of Manila (1978-1981). From there he went to Pasil, Cebú, as assistant parish priest till 1982. He was then transferred to the parish of Canlubang until 1985. He then applied for the missions and was sent here to Lospalos in Timor, Indonesia, where has been working for six years until his death.

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Noting some outstanding traits of his personality, I would like to say that,

1) Fr. Ernie Santos was a man gifted with temperamental goodness, certainly inherited from his deeply catholic parents. I am convinced that this natural talent he developed into virtue. Several times I myself have received impressions and feedbacks from people to substantiate what I say. He was appealing, affable, delicate, educated and refined in manners. People were pleased with Fr. Ernie. Here in Lospalos he will be remembered for his listening capacity, eagerness to help, goodness and patience, and especially his ability to encourage everyone.

2) This quality of goodness made him a "man of service". Asked of a favour, you could rest assured, Fr. Ernie would do it. With great sacrifice and endurance, hidden behind a smile, he was happy to serve all and do favours to anyone in need. Maybe this is what brought Fr. Ernie to his quick end. Even though his blood pressure went high and seemed visibly tired, his desire to serve and help others stretched him to his ultimate limits. It is a glorious day for the Congregation, when a Salesian dies "*sulla breccia*."

3) Fr. Ernie had a deep sense of humility. He accepted his limitations and was not bragging of anything, often asking for advice and presenting sincerely even the lack of results after several attempts to fulfil some of his assignments. He was open to his superiors and stuck to their guidance.

4) Only God knows the struggle of Fr. Ernie to remain faithful to his vocation. But his fundamental option to be a priest and later on a missionary, clearly indicated his determination to follow God's call, to the end of his life.

5) As a Priest and Salesian, he was zealous in attracting many to the holy Eucharist and to our Blessed Mother. When Timor because of politics, was in danger of bringing disaster and suffering to the people, he invited everyone to the One who could really solve the problems, and he organized a well participated daily Holy Hour of Adoration.

Through the Eucharistic and Marian Piety, he brought about healing to many troubled lives. And to his own confreres he kept reminding them that we are like "*wounded healers*" of our people.

The way Fr. Ernie has been healing others and himself is certainly worthy of imitation. He had been painstakingly allowing his natural and cultivated qualities of goodness, patience, cordiality, humility and dedication, to become a network of channels that knit the people with Mary, our Blessed Mother, and the Lord in the Eucharist.

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Fr. Ernie has left us many things worthy of emulation and imitation. We will always remember him as a good confrere, a friend and a brother to all.

While praying for his eternal repose, remember also this budding Provincial Delegation, which has a big field of apostolate and so few labourers. May the Lord send us vocations for Salesian life, after the example of Fr. Ernie Santos.

Sincerely Yours in Don Bosco,

Fr. José Carbonell, SDB.  
Provincial Delegate for Indonesia, Timor

#### *DATI PER IL NECROLOGIO*

Ernesto Santos Ramirez

Nato a Coron (Palawan) - Filippine, il 1 Febbraio 1948  
Morto a Lospalos, Timor-Timur, il 4 Giugno 1992, a 44 anni di età,  
25 di professione e 16 di sacerdozio. Fu Direttore per un anno.