

## "Waves of love and grace" replace a Tsunami's destruction

**TAKUAPA district (Thailand): 16th February 2008** -- Just a few hours ago the blessing of Our Lady of Grace Church at Takuapa District, Phang Nga Province Thailand, took place. Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio to Thailand, and Bishop Joseph Prathan Sridarunsil sdb of Suratthani diocese concelebrated Mass at 9.00 a.m. to begin a day of celebration which one observer described as 'waves of love and grace' now washing over a scene devastated on 26th December 2004 by the Tsunami.

With the support of the Thai Bishops Conference and the Suratthani Catholic Foundation, priests, religious and laity came to the support of Takuapa. Help came from Thailand and from abroad. Many people came to live amongst the people of the district, got to know them, know their sufferings, and sought to respond. They felt they wanted to set up something permanent in the region.

*Baan Porntawan* is the social-pastoral Centre of Suratthani Diocese at Takuapa. It is a centre for cultural and ecclesial learning, ecumenical and religious dialogue and social communications. It is an activities centre for young people, the elderly, villagers in general, for meetings, seminars, experiences in culture and faith. The Centre welcomes visitors from 60 villages along the Andaman Coast, 80 kms north and south of the Centre itself. It is a sign of God's love in the region.

When priests, religious and committed lay people began working in the area after the Tsunami, they found scattered Catholic families who no longer practiced their faith. Once *Baan Portawan* came into existence, as a unit of people in the first instance, these scattered families returned to full practice of their faith. 33 people in all, 23 Catholics and another 10 non-Catholics 'found faith'. In October of last year they gathered to say the Rosary together. At Christmas many returned through a good confession, and now, three years after the waves swept in and took all before them, 'Our Lady of Grace' stands looking across towards the beach three kilometers away. The church is built in the architectural style of this southern part of Thailand and stands on a hill planted with rubber trees. A large statue of Our Lady of Grace is at the entrance to the property.

This celebration is one of two taking place in Thailand today - the other is the Salesian Family Day in Bangkok. More of that later when our correspondent sends along the information.