

## *austraLasia* #2587

### **40 years on, an iconic image celebrates Don Bosco**

TONDO-MANILA: 1 February 2010 -- Smoky Mountain, a waste dump supposedly closed 20 years ago but still leaking toxic waste, still being added to, has about 40 years of existence, probably more. And that, for some, is an icon of Manila's poor. But there is another, far more uplifting image of Manila's poor, especially the young, which embraces many of the residents of nearby Tondo, and yesterday, January 31, Don Bosco Tondo celebrated 40 years after the visit of Pope Paul VI and the foundation of the parish that ministers to many of Smoky Mountain and surroundings' residents.

We are talking of course of the province known as North Philippines, which embraces four countries or part thereof: Philippines-Luzon Island, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and now Guam, with some 220 confreres with an average age of 46.6; 2 novices this year; 33 communities; hundreds, possibly thousands by now of lay mission partners. The province, at least the Philippines-Guam part, has just begun their extraordinary visitation, the visitor being Fr. Klement, who is no stranger to the scene.

But back to Tondo and the Salesian community there, which has its beginnings at least as far back as 1968 with the inception of the youth center, a community springing up from there just one year later, and the parish the year after that. For those who don't know the scene at all, Tondo is situated along the Manila waterfront.

The festivities on January 30-31 this year had a special touch, not only for religious reasons. This is pre-election season in the Philippines, and two of the three mayoral candidates found it useful to address parishioners -- though it must be said that they are also high-profile benefactors of the vocational training center. The VCT is a pearl of Salesian presence, with 700+ trainees in just about everything from seamanship to sewing. And around it, other than the parish (estimated some 250,000 parishioners) and the youth center, there is a clinic run by the FMAs, a kindergarten and prep (also FMAs), and two migrant youth hostels, one for girls with a capacity of 100 and an older facility for boys, capacity 40. "Migrant" in these parts might well mean people flooding in from other islands to the big city, looking for a better life -- or just excitement!

Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, archbishop of Manila, celebrated the Vigil Mass on the 30th. The Mass was followed by a two-hour procession through the Tondo barangays (a Filipino word, also known as a barrio), finishing with a fireworks display courtesy of a well-heeled Chinese benefactor.

It would be hoped that such an extensive Salesian work for the very poor would generate vocations -- and this it does. Poverty, generosity, and Salesian presence of the kind has produced some 19 Salesians, and currently there are 5 aspirants from Tondo in the juniorate at Canlubang.