

## ***austraLasia #2651***

### **Papal “Cross” for missionary in Thailand**

BANGKOK: May 30, 2010 -- The already much-honored and awarded Fr. Charles Velardo, director of the Skills Development Center for the Blind in Pakkred, Thailand, is to receive the papal decoration Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice on June 27, 2010, the date which celebrates the fifth year of the pontificate of Benedict XVI. Fr. Charles was recently informed of the honor by the papal nuncio to Thailand, Archbishop Pennacchio. The award will be made in a simple ceremony following Mass at Assumption Cathedral on that day.

Fr. Velardo has been featured in these pages now over a number of years (he has spent 30+ years working for the blind), and a quick résumé of recent activity soon underscores the breadth of activity and depth of charity exercised by this good Salesian missionary.

In 2006 he was awarded the royal honor of the Most Admirable Order of Direkgunabhorn. The fact that Fr. Velardo is not Thai (he is Italian) made that conferment all the more prestigious. In 2008 the Thai government saw fit to award him with “Outstanding Person in the Field of Disability,” for obvious reasons.

In the meantime, Fr. Velardo was demonstrating considerable creativity in his work with the blind, including a “Tour de Thailande” in which he had his blind cyclists join a tour that raises money for leukemia sufferers. His activity was not restricted to energetic pursuits only. He was also “virtual chaplain” to 500 top Italian chefs dotted around the world! Over all these years, until recently, he was also provincial treasurer and took part in reaching a significant MOU agreement with the Laotian Government on a new scheme involving training in technical skills for the poor and disadvantaged in Vientiane.

2009 brought recognition for his work from the St. Matthew Foundation, which awards the Van Thuan Solidarity and Development Prize set up to honor Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. This award is tied in directly with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

And now 2010 is crowned with a Cross! But not without its other laurels, including the opening earlier this year of the Don Bosco Sports Center for the Blind.