Celebrating 30 Years!

# Epic - 2006 Annual Report

**2006** was EPIC's thirtieth year of work promoting Peace, Sustainable Development, Environmental Protection, and Human Rights. In 1977 Father Thomas Cowley incorporated the Ecumenical Project for International Cooperation as a non-profit organization. Father Cowley, a native of England and a member of the Dominican Order in France, had long worked diligently for peace and justice as an expression of his faith. Cowley founded EPIC to continue and expand the efforts of the groups of faculty and students he had formed during his years of teaching in US universities.

This annual report will be organized around a few quotes by Fr. Thomas Cowley from a document providing a vision for the foundation EPIC. How has EPIC lived out Cowley's vision during 2006?

> **"That there is an immense variety in global problems almost defying generalization cannot be denied, although all are capable of being resolved if only the talent available in the international community… were to be harnessed for the task."** Fr. Thomas Cowley

## ADDRESSING POST-TRAUMA STRESS IN CHILDREN — Ages 3 to 12 years

On May 27, 2006, when a devastating earthquake hit Java, Indonesia, Nia Fliam-Ismoyo, an international batik artist, was living in the stricken city of Yogyakarta. She says, "In the days following the quake it seemed impossible to return to business as usual without extending a hand to those in desperate need." Working through two organizations with which she was associated, a Children's Activity Center was created in Sudimoro, a village where manywere killed and 90% of the residents had lost their homes.

For the September Independence Day celebration in the village, a boy's group gave a dynamic percussion performance, complimented by dances created by some of the girls.

The daily program serving about 75 children was run by 2 facilitators assisted by 14 volunteers - persons from the village and university students. A child psychologist with experience in trauma healing laid out the structure of the program. From June 26 to Sept. 15, when there was no school, the curriculum consisted of 3 phases: Phase I - Release Stress and Explore Emotions, Phase II- Encourage Hope, and Phase III - Self Esteem and Confidence to Achieve. The program truly demonstrated the healing powers of creativity. Two capable and committed young people of the village of Sudimoro, who had been touched by witnessing the process with the children, are now continuing the activities two days a week.

Based on the initial experience in Sudimoro, Nia Fliam-Ismoyo organized a second response, to work in Yogyakarta in four elementary schools that had been heavily effected by the earthquake. The program called **"When the Earth Speaks"** encourages students to view the earth as a living, moving entity that daily "speaks" to us. It has a two-pronged purpose: 1) helping children heal by expressing their feelings through creative writing and art and 2) teaching a basic scientific understanding of volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

Mt. Merapi, a volcano near Yogyakarta, was particularly active in 2006 after the earthquake. It was found that the children in the program were as afraid of a volcanic eruption as they were of earthquakes and tzunamis.

For the "When the Earth Speaks" program there were 28 volunteer facilitators - students and faculty recruited from several universities and Sunday school teachers skilled at working with children. This fall 2,442 children participated in the program.

## FARMER-TO-FARMER TRAINING AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

In 2006 the network of Farmer-to-Farmer Training Centers for which Laureano Jacobo has been giving leadership, received legal recognition from the Honduran government. This network now unites 17 farmer owned training centers throughout Honduras. All are promoting the type of sustainable agricultural practices that Laureano of La Semilla and Elias Sanchez of Loma Linda were pioneers in developing, refining, and teaching.

Candida Osorio, director of the Loma Linda Center, grows great organic vegetables used in the center's kitchen and sold at a local farmers' market. Her vegetables always impress and motivate farmers taking courses at the center.

Laureano Jacobo talks with Lawyer Tito Escobar regarding the legalization of Loma Linda. Loma Linda was the first farmer-to-farmer training center in Honduras and has provided a model for other centers in the network.

**MICROCREDIT—** Making Financing Available to the Most Disadvantaged

Felipa Xico (left), founder of Mujeres en Acción, with some of the staff of Mujeres en Acción

MUJERES EN ACCIÓN was started after civil war and violence in Guatemala during the 1980's left many widows without a means of support. Now Mujeres en Acción is working with 65 groups of indigenous Maya women. Since Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank were jointly awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 2006, the importance of microfinance has gained new prominence. In November 2006, Felipa Xico attended the Global Microcredit Summit in Canada.

In 2006, EPIC also funded Hurricane Stan relief work through Mujeres in Accion when the houses of 14 members of one of their groups were washed away.

## A PASSION FOR CARE OF CREATION

For the last 3 years, Felipe Tomás has assumed important leadership in his large Catholic parish, as *Mayordomo* (Lay Leader) and *Fiscal* (Treasurer). Working in Guatemala's Río Motagua watershed as director of the FUNDAMARCOS Sustainable Development Program, Felipe brings 33 years of experience teaching sustainable agriculture to poor hillside farmers. Felipe is able to integrate his Catholic faith and his traditional Maya worldview into his teaching of an agriculture that is based on caring for God's creation so that all life can go into the future as a interdependent sacred community.

Felipe Tomás wears his Maya *traje* (traditional dress) in his leadership roll at his church.

Since 1998, when Felipe began working with FUNDAMARCOS, his program has provided about 2,200 "participant years" of training in agricultural practices that:

- Prevent or stop erosion
- Manage God's gift of water
- Enrich and build up the soil
- Eliminate or reduce the use of herbicides and insecticides
- Care for existing forests and encourage planting more trees

Felipe Tomás (right) teaching farmers in San Mateo Milpas Altas, a new project where EPIC began work in 2006. He is instructing them in the use of an "A" frame to lay out contours for soil retaining barriers.

**“A radical change in our accustomed modes of thought and sense of priorities about our present styles of living and working is essential.”**

Fr. Thomas Cowley

## CHANGING FROM PETROLIUM BASED FERTILIZER TO ORGANIC FERTILIZER

As farmers learn to care for their farms organically, their soil becomes richer each year. Also the addition of organic material causes the soil to retain more moisture which increases production. As production increases, cost of production is decreasing because farmers are not buying expensive chemical fertilizer. EPIC programs teach various ways to produce and use organic fertilizer.

Bernardo Camaja decided he needed a cow in order to convert the abundant supply of grass from his contour barriers into fertilizer for his crops.

A worm “farm” produces a rich fertilizer for this young woman’s home garden.

Gilda Lopez reclaimed the poor soil on her newly acquired farm in Honduras by planting *macuna* (a fertilizer bean) as a green manure.

In Guatemala, FUNDAMARCOS extensionist Ceferino Moreno stands on his compost mountain!

Spreading the word—farmers gather to learn from Ceferino about how he makes organic fertilizer.

## HARVESTING WATER

In much of Mexico and Central America there is a great need to harvest rain water and hold it for the dry season. La Semilla del Progreso has been promoting the construction of water captation systems for a number of years. Now it is beginning to introduce cisterns that harvest roof water and hold it for later use for the household, garden, or livestock.

The Vicente Guerrero Development Program and MCC-Mexico, two organizations with whom EPIC has been coordinating for many years, have been in the forefront of designing and promoting low cost ferro-cement cisterns. In Nov. of 2005, EPIC sent Laureano Jacobo, director of La Semilla Training Center, to Mexico to learn from the Vicente Guerrero Program how to build these cisterns. This year he worked on the adaptations necessary for building cisterns in a Honduran context, and he has constructed a ferro-cement cistern at his center which will provide water for livestock. In February 2007, La Semilla will be hosting a training course on the construction of cisterns. Both local leaders from the La Semilla area and representatives from other Honduran development organizations have been invited.

## ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In the last 10 years Central America has been hit with hurricanes followed by draughts. Rains have been erratic, and the pattern for the beginning or end of the rainy season can no longer can be counted upon. To adapt to these changing weather patterns, the agricultural programs with which EPIC partners are implementing new farming techniques and promoting crop diversification. These countries have no federal disaster relief, and farmers must provide their own "crop insurance" to prepare for the extremes of nature already arriving with climate change.

Children learn from their parents how to use an "A" frame to lay out contours in order to manage water and conserve soil.

Bio-intensive growing trenches require enormous work to lay out, dig by hand, and fill with organic material. However, for this father and son planting bananas, assurance of a crop makes it worth while.

The following are some of the adaptations being taught by EPIC projects to help farmers cope with climate change:

- Planting a least one draught resistant crop, such as *yuca* (maniac), so farm families will have something to eat in a really dry year.
- Rock walls, grass barriers, and ditches—all built on the contour—to prevent erosion from torrential rains
- Bio-intensive growing trenches dug across hillside fields These retain runoff from rains, and because they are filled with organic material, they hold moisture and grow abundant crops in times of draught. They also prevent erosion from excessive rain and have provision for drainage of extra water.

**"It is clear that even the most advanced nations of the world have little to lose and much to gain from a concerted effort to promote the prosperity of the less developed countries. But few people among the privileged nations, especially in the west and more particularly in the United States, see the problem in that light."** Fr. Thomas Cowley

## IMMIGRATION

Rural families living in Mexico and Central America have been extremely adversely effected by globalized markets. EPIC works to enable these families to survive and support their children in their homelands. This is an alternative option in sharp contrast to dealing with immigration by hiring more border agents, building longer and higher walls, and incarcerating undocumented immigrants. As Fr. Thomas Cowley understood, prosperity for the poor solves problems for the wealthier nations.

Program strategies enabling farm families to live in Central America:

- Grow most of the food the family needs
- Produce at least one high value crop to sell for essential cash
- Reduce dependency on expensive purchased agro-chemicals

"Teach a family to fish…." A fish pond adds protein to the diet of a family in Guatemala—FUNDAMARCOS Sustainable Development Program.

Cilantro, a cash crop, is planted in small beds created among the rocks. Each week one bed is harvested to sell at the local market and another is planted.

For teens and young adults in Honduras, La Semilla's Agricultural Vocational Training Program gives hope and necessary skills to support their own families in the future. This can stop immigration upstream!


In La Sorto, Honduras, teens and their adult leaders celebrate the end of a year of training in the Vocational Agricultural Program.

Norman Gonzales, a member of the La Sorto teen group, stands in his healthy field of squash.

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