



Tropical Cyclone Harold damage to St Michel Technical College



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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

LOCKDOWN HAMPERS CYCLONE RELIEF IN VANUATU

Australian Marist Solidarity pleads for donations to re-build school with the support of John Therry Catholic College

On April 6, 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold made landfall on the island of Espiritu Santo as an intense Category 5 system with sustained winds of 200km/h. It is the world's strongest cyclone this year and the South Pacific's most powerful storm since Winston in February 2016, which brought catastrophic damage to Fiji. International development agency Australian Marist Solidarity has launched a national charitable recovery appeal for St Michel Technical College, which has been devastated by Tropical Cyclone Harold. St Michel provides critical skills development for Vanuatu with both mainstream and vocational education pathways and has been supported by the Marist Brothers for 26 years.

The school has 320 enrolled students from grades 7 to 12 and a further 80 enrolled in the vocational stream of the school. It has been seen as a beacon of hope on Espiritu Santo as it was one of the first schools established on the island. Vanuatu is one of very few places on Earth with no confirmed cases of COVID-19. To prevent the coronavirus from being brought to Vanuatu, officials have banned foreign aid workers from entering the country to help with the recovery. Supplies that enter Vanuatu are being quarantined for three days and sanitised to ensure there is no remaining risk of coronavirus transmission.

Australian Marist Solidarity CEO Rebecca Bromhead said the situation remains critical and this appeal is vital to ensuring the local school is rebuilt. "Supporting a remote community to recover from a cyclone like Harold is challenging at the best of times, but to do so in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic will require complex and sustained efforts." She continued, "In times like these, the best chance for recovery is found in existing relationships and networks. Standing together in solidarity with our friends at St Michel will ensure the best possible future for the young people of Vanuatu, but we can't do it alone. We need your support to be able to carry out vital rebuilding at the school as quickly as possible."

Gavan Martyn from John Therry Catholic College said, "We at John Therry Catholic College are committed to help and we reach out to other Marist communities to financially support this worthy AMS cause. We have visited both St Michel at Luganville and St Anne's in Port Orly in the last two years with staff immersions. We had 13 staff and

family members working in solidarity with these schools in 2018 / 2019. This year we planned to have 14 staff and students live in these Marist communities in Santo until the enforced travel restrictions and now the disastrous impact of Cyclone Harold which has unfortunately postponed this immersion until 2021.”

It is this love of community that will be driving them to rebuild right now but they do need our financial support too. These communities are blessed with a strong family spirit and love of God.”

Gavan further says that, “Any financial help as part of this AMS fundraising effort will be so vital for their future lives.”

To support the re-build of St Michel Technical College visit www.australianmaristsolidarity.org.au

About Australian Marist Solidarity in Vanuatu

The Marist Brothers have been working in Vanuatu since 1991 and Australian Marist Solidarity has played a vital role in recovery and rebuilding in this region, including after Cyclone Pam which hit Vanuatu in March 2015. Australian Marist Solidarity’s work is focussed on the education of children and young people, which is vital to securing the best possible future for vulnerable communities.

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