



*A makeshift classroom on the grounds of St Michel Technical College*



*Without a lunchroom, students eat under the trees.*

## MEDIA RELEASE

### #COVIDCANTSTOPGOOD: GENEROSITY HELPS FUEL RECOVERY AFTER TROPICAL CYCLONE HAROLD

It has been almost three months since the category five TC Harold struck Vanuatu, destroying 90 percent of buildings in the worst-hit areas and impacting over 160,000 people. The overwhelming global experience of COVID-19 has led to significant underreporting on TC Harold's devastation and there has been a reduction of available funding from international donors for the TC Harold response.

Vanuatu is one of the few places on Earth with no confirmed cases of COVID-19. However, the pandemic has caused major limitations on the normal response mechanisms for a natural disaster. Supply chains have been disrupted and access to international specialised personnel restricted to remote advice and assistance.

International development agency Australian Marist Solidarity was quick to launch a national charitable recovery appeal to raise funds for repair and recovery for St Michel Technical College, which has been devastated by TC Harold. St Michel's provides critical skills development for Vanuatu with both academic and vocational education pathways and has been supported by the Marist Brothers for 26 years. In the wake of TC Harold, the response to this appeal has represented the very best of what we know and love about our community, with a broad range of Australian Catholics coming together to stand in solidarity with the people of Vanuatu.

AMS CEO, Rebecca Bromhead, stated, "Through the generous donations we have received, we are proud to announce that we have already raised half the funds needed for repairing four key priority buildings for St Michel Technical College. While we still have a way to go in funding the restoration of all of the damaged areas, we are pleased to be able to move forward quickly to the next phase for a number of buildings and help the students of St Michel return to a safe learning environment as soon as possible."

With classrooms destroyed, lessons are taking place in makeshift classrooms. And with space limited, teachers are forced to rethink lessons and learning space. The college wanted to get students back to school as quickly as possible to restore normalcy for the community. St Michel Technical College English teacher, Marist Brother Raphael Fakaia said, "Students have since returned to school, though, due to the significant damage of the school,

classes are being rotated as there is not enough room to accommodate the students together. In some cases, classes are being held under trees as there are no classrooms to accommodate them.” With the rainy season continuing, there remain significant challenges for staff and students, but they are determined to continue teaching and learning.

For those who wish to make a tax-deductible donation and support the re-build of St Michel Technical College visit [www.australianmaristsolidarity.org.au](http://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 Tropical 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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#### **For media enquiries, please contact:**

Leigh Holohan

P: 0430 66 99 29

E: [leigh.holohan@marists.org.au](mailto:leigh.holohan@marists.org.au)