



## **Our lady of the slums**

By Jim Pollard

**Daily Xpress**

Published on May 19, 2008

**An Aussie nun is busy buying school uniforms for hundreds of children from the Klong Toey slum. April and May is usually the busiest time of year for Sister Joan Evans, the Aussie nun who has devoted the second half of her life to helping the poor in the Klong Toey slum.**

And this year is no exception. The queues of needy people - and other hopefuls looking for a handout - lining up outside her shack in Rong Moo, the Slaughterhouse community popularised by Father Joe Maier, are as long as ever.

But her main task now is new school uniforms for slum kids - a project dear to the heart of the Perth nun, now in her mid-70s, who worked for 40 years as a high-school teacher and headmistress. "Education is the key to these kids having a better future." She has said that too many times to count since her arrival in Bangkok in 1991.

She's got a familiar routine these days. Several times a week she and three Thai assistants meet about 30 slum kids at a small shop at the Klong Toey market, where she gets a good deal on bulk purchases.

### **Education Project**

The children are fitted for new uniforms and shoes - two shirts and two pants for boys, two skirts and two blouses for girls, plus socks, shoes (at a separate store) and a bag.

The start of the school year is a major financial burden for many poor families and Sister Joan's attitude has been to try to do whatever she can to keep the kids in school - even if it means paying their transport and food costs, plus sundry other household expenses.

Last year, at least 602 children from under-privileged families benefited from her "Education Project", which spent more than Bt 412,000 buying uniforms and shoes at an average cost of just under Bt 700. In 2006, her outlay was Bt 435,000 for 604 children.

### **Reliant on donors**

This year, the figure may be slightly smaller, but she is still reliant on donors. Major supporters last year included the Australian Embassy and the Australian and New Zealand Women's Group.

The beneficiaries of her extraordinary work are a vast multitude of busy ordinary people; often single working mothers, grateful that their daughter or son has been able to secure a job or a place at university when too many around them have fallen into drug dealing, sex work and other sad tales of woe.

### **MORE ON THE WEB:**

[www.sisterjoan.info](http://www.sisterjoan.info)