

A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

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## June 2016 Newsletter - Volume 13 Issue 5

### 2016 Dental Clinic – Another Success!

Our thanks to dentist Phong Rang San Thach and his team for their work with the children and care givers of Vinh Son. The clinics began on May 26<sup>th</sup>, and are being managed by the on-site nuns. This is a co-operative effort with our good friends at Children of Vinh Son (CoVS). The photos below were taken at VS-1.

**Good health begins with healthy teeth!!**

Our dear friend, Ms. Thien, managed the dental check-ups at Sao Mai orphanage in Pleiku. 25 kids were treated; many others were on vacation and will be checked later.



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- The rains have come
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### Vietnam's Central Highlands struggles with historic drought

**VietnamNetBridge – April 1, 2016**

***The drought is forecast to peak in April and persist through May, which means relief may not come until June, a late start for the rainy season. In the severe drought that has lasted for several months, water levels of hundreds of reservoirs in the Central Highlands provinces are now at 30-40% of capacity.***

#### **Sister Josie's report also paints a painful picture**

In the past, the weather in Kontum was very nice. It used to be cool during the summer, and cold and fresh during the winter. Unfortunately, the weather now has changed because there is too much pollution caused by factories and disasters. A couple of weeks ago, I visited Vinh Son 3, 4, and 6, along with the surrounding villages. I felt sorry for the children who could not sleep well because of the hot weather. The sisters tried to put fans in each room, but it did not seem to help at all. Some of them wake up many times to wash their faces just to cool down.

This drought affects our lives in different ways. As we know, water plays a very essential part of our life because we need water to live, as do animals and plants. Besides that, we need water to grow the food we eat. We also use water for many different things in our lives, like washing dishes, cooking, bathing, and swimming. Therefore, lacking water causes many difficulties for children. Whenever the children feel hot, they just want to take a shower. However, they cannot do that since they do not have enough water. This drought has also affected children's health. In fact, there were some children who caught fevers and headaches and many of them have fallen asleep in class because the weather was too hot and they do not have fans in classrooms. Therefore, they sometimes do not keep up with the lessons in class.

## Sister Josie's report, continued

The sisters now have to leave some of their land empty since the fields are dry up after many week of drought. Therefore, it is very difficult for us to water our plants, so we cannot farm as we previously did. That is a big challenge for the sisters to take care of the children because now we have to buy not only meat and fish, but vegetables as well. That means the sisters have to spend more money on daily food.



Two of Joanne's new friends

## Drought update from Joanne Glah

While I was in Kontum from May 13-May 29 I was happy to see the rainy season begin, with several hours of rain every day by the last week of my visit. It was good to see the rice paddies begin to fill with water, the green vegetable gardens at VS-1, and the plentiful water supply from the wells. While visiting VS-1 and VS-3 I saw that when the children returned after school they were able to shower freely. Back in March, I saw that unlike the wells at the orphanages, which continued to have water during the dry season, many small family wells were dry. I was happy to see that now they again had water.

We had received pictures of many fans donated to each of the orphanages because of the extreme heat. At VS-3, I saw that each of the dorms had these new fans mounted on the ceilings and that at lunch time the children were able to be in their rooms enjoying them.



## Melting your heart...why we do this

Pat's photos taken during his 2012 visit to VS-4: Sister Lieng baking bread and a few of his favorite images

*We recently came across an on-line article from August 2015, written by a freelance writer, Matthew Clayfield, for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The title of the piece is:*

## *Vietnam's orphans: Lives of hope and poverty*

*It can be found at:*

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-29/vietnam-s-orphans-lives-of-hope-and-poverty/6732562>

## FVSO VP Pat McKee reacts to the article

The ABC news article focuses on one of the orphanages that FVSO supports. I have met Sister Lieng at Vinh Son 4 several times, and she is the hardest working person I have ever seen. When any of us visit, we always have to wait while they find her. She is always found in the fields driving a tractor or hoeing weeds and doing whatever needs to be done to make the kid's lives better. She runs VS-4 and through her hard work and personal efforts, they now have a piggery, a bakery that sells some bread in the village and bakes it for their own consumption. They raise chickens for eggs and have built a fish pond, bucket by bucket, to raise catfish, improving the protein in their diets.

To a reporter, the children might look very poor and hopeless. To us, they look prosperous beyond our wildest hopes and dreams, considering their condition when we found them. The boys were sleeping in bamboo or thatched huts with no beds, mosquito nets or blankets. The kids worked or went to school for half a day then went into the village to beg for food for an evening meal, every day. Their water supply for everything was a muddy seasonal creek. They were unhealthy, listless, and starving. Now, they have fresh purified water, medicine, healthy food 3 times a day, dental care, medicine, school supplies, clothing, new dorms, beds, blanket and nets. **They are much happier and look like normal kids.**

Below is the incredible story of two women who left behind their care giving jobs at Vinh Son Orphanage to expand their universe. Obtaining scholarships to attend college here in the USA, they have recently graduated. Although FVSO did not provide financial support, some Board Members have helped the nuns, and their story comes to us from Clyde Lewandowski.

### “Is this Heaven? It’s Iowa.”

Six years ago, two young Catholic nuns (Sister Celine and Sister Josie) left Kontum to attend college in Epworth, Iowa. Upon arrival, they were met by Fr. Simon, a Vietnamese priest who helped them overcome their fear of the unknown, and helped them to settle in at Divine Word College. The first two years were spent studying English as a second language. This included speaking, reading, writing, & listening, and was a language immersion program requiring students to speak only English.

To reduce loneliness, the college requires students from Vietnam to arrive in pairs so they have a friend, and activities are constantly scheduled to minimize downtime. During the summers, Celine and Josie traveled to Memphis where they taught the Vietnamese language to young Vietnamese children. While there, they stayed with a woman named Bobbie Donnelly and her husband. The Donnelly’s became their surrogate mom and dad. The school also encourages involvement from local families, who are referred to as the "fan club" by the students. They spend time together, and greatly enjoy the shopping expeditions and the American holidays. Many of the “fan club” are Vietnamese from Galena and as far away as Chicago. Other friends, including **FVSO Board Members**, have attended special occasions at the college, like Mission Sunday, Lunar New Year, and graduation ceremonies.

After their two-year language program, they entered a four year college degree program at Divine Word. Students are involved in sports, music programs, and speaking & singing at church services. They make new friends from around the world and learn to appreciate diversity and cultural differences. A wide range of college majors are available, all related to skills necessary to be a missionary. Many cultural programs are available as electives, including music and painting.

Finally, after six full years away from home - separated from parents, friends, culture, and away from the children at the Vinh Son whom they love so much - Sister Josie Y Prunh and Sister Celine Y Thoa completed their college program and received their diplomas.

Upon her graduation last fall, Sister Josie decided to go back to Kontum where she is now teaching theology to the sisters. She is also coordinating the **FVSO** scholarship program and our dental care program.

Sister Celine required a bit longer to graduate and received her diploma, with Magna Cum Laude, on May 13, 2016. She decided to continue her education and was awarded a scholarship to attend Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut. She hopes to earn a Master’s Degree in theology. But first, on May 19<sup>th</sup>, she travelled back to Vietnam, where she will spend a month renewing her religious vows, while visiting her family and many friends. The children at Vinh Son will be happy to see her!

### Congratulations, Sr. Josie and Sr. Celine, on your many accomplishments!



Founded by the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Divine Word College is the only undergraduate Roman Catholic seminary in the U.S. dedicated to educating men and women for missionary service. It is located in Epworth, Iowa. Though its primary goal is preparing young men to become Divine Word Missionary priests and brothers, since 2007 the college has also offered its educational resources to religious sisters, other Catholic seminarians and laypersons.

**Sister Josie on the left, Sister Celine on the right. They also pose with FVSO Board Member, Clyde Lewandowski (Celine is the taller one).**



FVSO Board Members, Joanne and Steve, have taken their commitment to Vinh Son to new heights. With their own funding, they have initiated a project to improve the future of Vinh Son “graduates,” through a specially designed sewing program, described below.

## A Small Step Toward Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

**Joanne Glah and Steve Fisher**

In March, 2014, Steve and I visited the Vinh Son Orphanages for the first time, and learned that many of the children are economic orphans, and that some of the children there now are children of children who grew up in the orphanage. While FVSO provides funds for continuing education, not everyone has the aptitude or desire to go to further schooling or to leave their village.

In 2015, we returned to Kontum with the idea of teaching girls, who have aged out of VS-3, a skill that would provide them with an income, and allow them to stay in their

villages while maintaining traditional lifestyles. Before we even formalized our idea, Sister Gabrielle asked if we could do something to help the girls who had left the orphanage, to earn money! That became the initial impulse for our Vinh Son 3 “**sewing class.**”

Steve and I returned this past March to kick-off our project. We bought sewing machines, and hired a teacher, a 15 year old girl who had graduated from Sister Pauline’s sewing class. Sister Gabrielle chose 10 girls who had been at VS-3 but now lived in the village. For two months, we paid the girls to come to sewing lessons everyday. They worked diligently and all learned basic sewing skills.

Then, in May, I was back in Kontum, and with the sewing teacher, Lisa, we designed four textile products that will also incorporate traditional hand weaving. That traditional work is being done by older women in the village who still work in the “old ways.” The “**sewing class**” will create the basic products (shoulder bags, back packs, cosmetic bags, and throw pillow covers), while the hand-woven material is designed to embellish the final products. These items will be sold in the United States on the website: **LoveWithoutBordersVietnam.com**

We see this as a pilot project, and if successful, we’ll apply for grant money to help grow the business for these and many more women. We are reminded...we can’t always change the world...but we can change the world for these women.

### Long-term supporting organizations

- 189<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada Cnty, CA
- Counterparts Association
- 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Btn. Assoc.
- MilSpec Tours (800-953-5812)
- Fr. Luke Tran (VN-SHEP) Social Health Education Projects
- Fr. Relihan, Sacred Heart Church, Lone, CA
- Rotary Club of San Juan Capistrano, CA

*If someday they say of me that in my work I have contributed something to the welfare and happiness of my fellow man, I shall be satisfied.*

- George Westinghouse

*Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.*

- Edmund Burke

### Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 830 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St. Paul Chartres
- Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

### Officers

- President** – Pat Leary  
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**Treasurer** - Colleen Sands  
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**1st VP** - Sr. Marie Dominique  
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 Clyde Lewandowski  
 Bart Ruud  
 Dave Chaix  
 J. Glah & S. Fisher

### Advisory Board

- John Scott  
 Bruce Herron

### Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son

Donations are gratefully accepted year round

100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers