

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

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March Newsletter - Volume 9 Issue 3

## March 2012 Trip Report & Images

**FVSO Board Member, Pat Leary, has recently returned from Vietnam. During his 7-day stay, Pat visited every Vinh Son location, as well as Sao Mai. Each night, he sent out an email that summarized his activities and key learning's during the visits. What follows are excerpts from those nightly messages.**

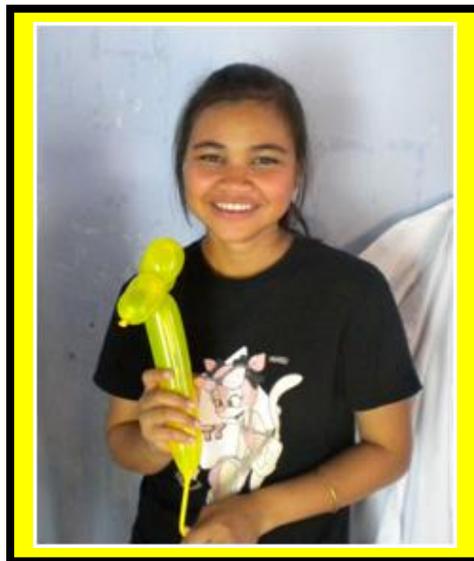
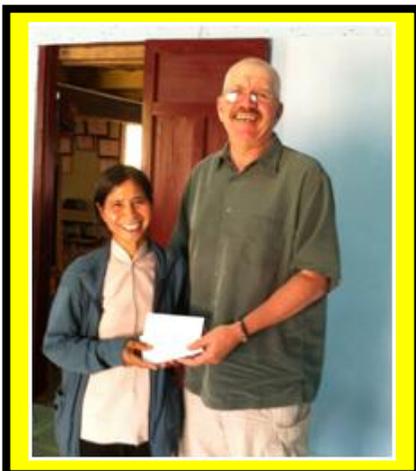


I met with Mother Superior and all the sisters on Monday, March 19th. Sisters and helpers from all 6 Vinh Sons were there.

As we know the Montagnards are a minority in every sense of the word. It seems one does not need a degree to be a "teacher" in a minority village. I am told that sometimes a child, usually a girl, from VSO will return to a village, have a baby or two, decide that they can be a local "teacher" because their training at VSO is superior to what normal villagers get, so something good is happening there.

They will redo budgets and projections at the end of the summer when the kids return from the villages. There is a lot of turn over at that time. There are 26 Communities in which the sisters help the poor in the Kontum area. There are 4 more in Pleiku area. These are not considered orphanages like VSO.

"Ambassador" Leary (below) has been a welcome guest at the Vinh Son and Sao Mai orphanages on many occasions in the past. He always brings a smile and offers support wherever he goes. His keen observations and insights help us to better understand the needs of the children and caregivers.



**Sao Mai:** I spent part of the afternoon playing with the children and making balloon animals. As this was my last stop I gave my balloons and air pump to sister. She was delighted. I taught one older kid the basics of balloon animals. Now I have competition as a birthday clown when I come back.

As I toured the building I saw some of the kids had figured out how to make water balloons out of broken balloons. Likely I will not be invited back.

## Each caregiver had the chance to share their priority list

**VS2:** I watched the baking process. It is most impressive. There were 8-10 children kneading dough and making loaves. There was young man responsible for making the dough in a large industrial mixer. There was a senior nun in charge with an impressive watchful eye. It was very obvious that the kids were experienced. There was happy chatter but little wasted movement. The kids moved the dough and the loaves using a good degree of team work.

They make 4 trays of loaves, 100 loaves per tray. The young man makes 4 batches of dough. He has staged his ingredients in premeasured containers (bread is more complex than I thought) on a nearby shelf. So the preparation of each batch went like clock work. I couldn't stick around long enough to taste the results but the smell of fresh bread was wonderful. Sister Jeanne has done a great job here.



"The aroma of baking bread was enough to make Pat's mouth water!"



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**VS3:** Sr Gabriel is as sweet as ever. We had a great lunch. She now has 57 children and has opened the doors to feed the villagers as well. She did not say how many or how often.....just used the words "more and more."

### **Project for play-room:**

The children do not have an indoor play room. They want to tear down an existing one level dorm, make it two stories and add a playroom on the bottom floor. She will take the tractor into town and buy the material and then use local labor for construction. No idea about price. I told her to submit formal requests to us.

**VS4:** The handicapped carpenter boy now has a first class wheel chair. He is learning sewing as a trade. I am delighted to see him...he is always happy. No word on my bicycle friend, as they have not heard from him.

**Kitchen:** God bless her soul. Sister Lieng raised enough money selling tapioca this year to buy materials for a new kitchen. She is using older VS boys who no longer go to school as construction workers. She is well under way in building and needs no help.

**New dorm:** There is a new bamboo hut in back kiddie corner from the new kitchen. Has a dirt floor and a drainage trench around it for the rains. Houses about 30 boys. She wants a permanent structure. She says it is 200,000,000 dong...about \$10,000. But she has no contractor or plans.



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**VS5:** Sister Truk tells me that her location is the only place that has property ownership issues. If there are new projects allowed, Sr. Truk wants a fence around the entire compound since currently it is on the frontage road. She also wants new bathrooms. Currently she has only two to service almost 100 kids.

**VS6:** Sister Y Nhun has 72 children. They are going to need bathrooms soon but she did not mention it. Little boy with scabies...head is correctly shaved and scabies appear to be healing. He had lots of smiles today. The big water holding tank in front was paid for by sister from selling vegetables to the villagers. The road to VS 6 is getting worse and worse. It is almost impossible to get a car back there.

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**Sao Mai:** I met with Sister Sophie Khiet. The situation at Sao Mai is stable. There are 52 children, 8 with disabilities. She expects a brand new baby to come in a few weeks. The kids here are true orphans and do not return to the villages etc for holidays. This may explain why the numbers here are relatively stable. Sister said she would accept as many true orphans who come.

# ***“We have done more than most folks can imagine”***

## **VS1: List of Special Projects**

**Project 1:** The reception room where we are traditionally met has to be torn down and replaced. It is termite infested and the outer patio is in risk of collapsing. This room shares a wall with the new conference, reception room we just built. Now they will tear out the common wall. The old building is termite infested. I think that problem needs to be solved first. How do you do that over here? The building will shortly be unsafe.

**Project 2:** A tin roof open sided structure to dry clothes at the end of the boy’s dorm on the lower level. Will need a concrete pad as well.

**Project 3:** A 2 meter wide sidewalk from the lower boy’s dorm back to the pig farm.

**Project 4:** A paved walkway between the upper level courtyard and the lower level boy’s dorm.

I told them for all projects to send us detailed plans, drawing and request for money. We also want to know the name of the contractor.



**Overall Recap:** I have spent 7 wonderful days at Vinh Son and Sao Mai. We have done more than most folks can imagine. It is good to see this place in annual increments because the changes just pop out.

The nursery at VS1 his well staffed, the babies are clean and happy. They are being played with when ever I stop in. I try to make it unannounced. After my ranting last year I am pleased. In general the kids all seem healthier and happier but of course that is difficult to quantify. I have watched their meals closely and have a new insight.

When you go to the local market you see very little meat or fish or protein. The common diet here is rice and veggies. To be sure some meat and fish but I do not think much. When I wandered around the kitchens and looked at the tables during lunch I did see a little meat but I also saw a lot of tofu which is a good sub for meat.

The big thing I noticed is that the VS locations have really developed their farms. Each one seems to have a bigger, much bigger, herd of pigs and chickens than last year. VS3 is even raising wild boars because the price is so good on the market. I assume the children are getting some of this bounty as well.

It really is wonderful to see. I wish you could be here to see for yourself. Please know everything you have worked for and done for these kids is having positive results. We have given them the confidence to focus on things other than daily necessities. They are sending nuns to school for further education in nursing, teaching and accounting. Through the help of Rich Grame, they are able to focus more attention on health care, which is so important.

**We are making a positive difference in the lives of these children. Thanks for allowing me to represent FVSO! Our donors continue to make all this possible...every day! They should be very proud.**

Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts	Officers	Board	Donation Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population – approximately 730 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities</li> <li>• Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal &amp; St. Paul Chartres</li> <li>• Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam</li> <li>• \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month</li> </ul>	<p><b>President</b> - Dave Chaix</p> <p><b>Secretary</b> - Dennis Coyne</p> <p><b>Treasurer</b> - Colleen Sands</p> <p><b>Senior VP</b> - Pat McKee</p> <p><b>1st VP</b> - Sr. Marie Dominique</p> <p><b>2nd VP</b> - Michael Little</p>	<p>Hank Gonzales</p> <p>Rich Lahey</p> <p>Clyde Lewandowski</p> <p>Bart Ruud</p> <p>Patrick Leary</p> <p>Pat Keegan</p> <p>Alan Brooks</p> <p>Richard Grame</p>	<p>Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son</p> <p>Donations are gratefully accepted year round</p> <p>100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers</p>