

Greetings to friends of Vinh Son Orphanage**March 2009**

We recently returned from a visit to the 4 Vinh Son Orphanages in Kontum, Vietnam. Travelers included a combined 25 Officers, Board members and dedicated supporters. We traveled through Laos and Northern Vietnam before spending 4 wonderful days at the orphanages. From there, we moved on to Ban Me Thuot, Nha Trang, finally completing our journey in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Although we did tour much of the countryside, the primary reason for our trip was to spend quality time at the orphanages. It's why we go back year after year, and it's also why we pay for all expenses, **not a dime coming from your donations.**

Many of our wives and family members joined us for their first-time visit with the children. They eagerly organized a clothing and toy drive using items carried from the U.S., along with those purchased in the local market. The gifts were a delight for the children, since they really don't have many personal possessions. Although VS 3 and VS 4 are located in more remote areas, we were able to distribute some of these items there as well, something we hadn't logically been able to do previously. It was a joy for our first time visitors to observe how the children unselfishly shared their gifts and interacted with one other in total glee.

One highlight of the trip was a 2 day medical clinic conducted by two of our travelers, Dr. Jerry Duwel M.D., Patricia Coyne R.N., and assisted by other group members. Many of the elderly Sisters, along with most of the children who required treatment, were evaluated and treated. Dr. Jerry and Pat were able to identify and document the most serious needs going forward. The Sisters committed to follow up with the prescribed care.

To summarize basic conditions, we saw a marked improvement at all 4 facilities, but by any standards, we have much left to do. Because they receive far fewer visitors, the needs at VS 2, VS 3 and VS 4 remain more acute. Although VS 1 must also depend on outside assistance, it receives more help from other non-profit organizations and tourists who drop in as they visit the old Wooden Church. The work we've accomplished with medical and dental care (partnering with East Meets West and Friends of the Central Highlands) is making a huge difference in the children's' quality of life. Availability of clean water and proper dietary supplements must also continue to be focus areas.



As we've done during previous visits, FVSO Board members met with the Sisters and caregivers on the last evening to discuss the past year and plan projects for 2009. The Sisters are very appreciative of our continued support and had a number of requests that will be detailed below. It was during this meeting that we voiced concern about a current medical crisis we'd witnessed, an outbreak of "scabies" (parasite infections). We learned, however, that because no funds had been set aside for medical emergencies, this outbreak could not be treated. Dumbfounded, we immediately allocated funds to purchase the medicine necessary to address the situation. Just as important, we then established a medical "pool" for each site that would ensure that cash-on-hand is available to address future emergencies. As funds are depleted from the pool to purchase needed

medicines, receipts will be forwarded to FVSO so that the pool can be replenished. Basically, it's a perpetuating fund. As with any new concept, we'll monitor this program closely.

Observations for each site follow.

Vinh Son 1 (VS 1)

As stated above, VS 1 is in the best shape, but still demands attention. The Sisters and caregivers work tirelessly, as they do at all the facilities, but they are few and the needs are many. We met with Graham Sijben (from the Netherlands), Jean-Pierre De Rouck (from Belgium), Gene Flynn and Thien (from FoCH) as well as others to ascertain how best to maximize our joint efforts.

Gene is continuing his objective to find a better source of water and FVSO is committed to help. One of the projects we funded this trip was trenches and piping to divert the laundry water away from the well head (project is now complete and the water will need to be tested again).

We distributed funds for various projects that included the support of farming operations and addressing the increasing size of the sewing class. This particular project is really a great two year program, allowing the girls to keep their sewing machines upon graduation.

The nursery, hosting 10-day old twin boys at the time, proved to be a delightful stop this year. The little ones are housed here, and those old enough to walk will attempt to climb your legs in order to be held. Pulling at our heart strings, the nursery was a big hit, especially with the ladies.

There are approximately 200 children at VS 1 (2 to 1 girl/boy ratio).



Vinh Son 2 (VS 2)

We have been able to improve the children's diet and have taken on the responsibility for educational fees, but much more is needed to bring this site up to the level of VS 1. The facilities are in poor condition and are in need of repair. With fewer tourist visits, VS 2 does not benefit from spontaneous donations. The children are well cared for and happy (as they are at each site).

We are committed to providing clean and consistent water to VS 2, but must wait for an engineering report from our friends at East Meets West. The surface water is polluted and the four wells are nearly empty in the dry season. Our thought is to drill a deep well and encase it, or provide a deep hand-dug well with cement pipe casing. More analysis will hopefully result in a successful solution.

Older children were working in the fields (harvesting manioc the day of our visit), while medium age children helped prepare meals, wash clothes and take care of the small ones. We need to think about facility improvements after the well project is completed. The Sisters and caretakers are wonderful, but just need more help and resources.

There are approximately 200 children at VS 2 (2 to 1 girl/boy ratio).

Vinh Son 3 (VS 3)

There was a visible difference at VS 3 from past visits. FVSO has invested much over the last few years and it's paying dividends. The children, who are older at this site since there are no infants, are quite appreciative of our efforts to improve their lives. We have built a kitchen, dining room, toilets and showers. In partnership with "Colour4Kids" of the Netherlands, a tractor, trailer and ploughshare have been purchased, giving VS 3 the capability to harvest cash crops that can be sold at market. We observed a tremendous manioc crop that was on its way to town. Because this small facility is so remote and not visited by tourists, FVSO has become the sole supporter of VS 3.

There are 35 children at VS 3 (predominantly girls).



Vinh Son 4 (VS 4)

VS 4 is another small orphanage even further out from Kontum than VS 3. We have been trying to improve the facilities here, but have had difficulty obtaining government permission for building projects. With work just started, a new kitchen and dining room should be completed in April. Going forward, we would like to build a boy's dormitory and will be looking for a project partner to help with that expense. In the past year, we combined efforts with "Colour4Kids" to purchase a tractor and trailer that will make VS 4 more self sufficient. Last year's projects included the construction of a piggery, stocked with 30 piglets. This will have long term benefits, providing food as well as commerce.

Before FVSO donors intervened, VS4 was dependent on hand-outs from the local market to survive. Hunger was an everyday event. Since then, your contributions have not only provided the food, but the hope for a better future. VS 4 depends on us for most of their needs.

There are 65 children at VS 4 (2 to 1 girl/boy ratio).

Closing Remarks

Despite all the progress achieved to date, there is so much left to do. While maintaining our focus on "basic needs," FVSO is also committed to creating an environment that nourishes Vinh Son children in their daily lives and provides life skills for their future. As we toured the grounds of all 4 facilities, it was obvious that we had "done good" so far, but much is left undone. Only with your support will our goals be accomplished, and the children's dreams be realized.

Thank-you for all you do to help these wonderful children. We at FVSO humbly ask for your continued support. Donations are gratefully accepted year round.

This report is respectfully submitted by the Officers and Board of Friends of Vinh Son.

**It takes a community to make a difference
Please share this message with your friends and family**

Distributions made during the February visit

VS 1, VS 2, VS 3 and VS 4

- Funds for Basic Needs
- Funds for Medicine and Medical Supplies
- Funds for Field Expenses
- Funding for the Next 12 Months Dental Visits (joint project with FoCH)

VS 1

- Sewing Class Expenses
- Computer Class Expenses
- Awning for Boy's Dormitory
- Classroom Doors
- Piping and Drains for the Laundry around the Well

VS 2

- Computer Class Expense
- 4 Months of Flour for Bread
- 4 Months of Powdered Milk
- 4 Months of Meat, Fish and Vegetables to add Protein

VS 3

- Chicken Coop and 20 Chickens
- Fixed Motorbike
- 4 Months of Rice
- 4 Months of Meat, Fish and Vegetables to add Protein

VS 4

- New Chalkboard
- Water Filter System for Well
- Bicycle Repair Program
- Tires for Trailer
- Tables for Dining Room
- 20 Chickens
- 4 Months of Rice
- 4 Months of Meat, Fish and Vegetables to add Protein

Total Disbursement = \$19,344

2009 Planned Projects

- VS 1 – Work with FoCH to provide a clean and protected water source
- VS 2 – Provide a new well, filter system and piping.
- VS 2 – Continue to provide flour for bread on 4 month intervals
- VS 2 – Continue to provide powdered milk on 4 month intervals
- VS 2 – Continue to provide meat, fish and vegetables to add protein on 4 month intervals.
- VS 2 – Provide school expenses, school clothes and books for the school year 2009 – 2010
- VS 3 – Continue to provide rice on 4 month intervals
- VS 3 – Continue to provide meat, fish and vegetables to add protein on 4 month intervals.
- VS 3 – Provide school expenses, school clothes and books for the school year 2009 – 2010
- VS 4 – Continue to provide rice on 4 month intervals
- VS 4 – Continue to provide meat, fish and vegetables to add protein on 4 month intervals.
- VS 4 – Provide school expenses, school clothes and books for the school year 2009 – 2010
- VS 4 – Build a boy's dormitory

Vinh Son 4 Kitchen/Dining Room under construction

