

May Newsletter 2018 Special Edition

Sr. Marie Dominique Nguyen

January 19, 1936 — May 1, 2018

62 Years of Vocation

Age 82

Contact & Donation Information

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Dear Friends of Sister Marie Dominique,

It is with great sadness that I write to let you know of the quick and peaceful passing of Sr. Marie Dominique. We found your email in her frequent contacts and want you to be aware not only of her sudden death but of the planned services to celebrate her life.

We know each of you will remember Sr. Marie Dominique in your own loving way. If you are in the area and wish to join us at her services, we would welcome you. However, we need to know very soon if you are planning to attend.

With Hope and Trust in the Risen Lord,

Sister Margaret Louise, DC

Dear Sister Margret Louise,

On behalf of the Board of FVSO and all the children that Sister Marie Dominique has helped in her amazing life, please know that although we are saddened by her passing, we are happy that after her many years of devoted service she is now at peace with God. We know that God has her in his hands.

Sister Marie Dominique was an important part of FVSO. Her insight and guidance to the cultural barriers we have with Montagnards can not be replaced. Thousands of children and caregivers in Kontum benefitted greatly from her hard work. FVSO also benefitted from her example of patience and understanding. I personally benefitted from her subtle pushes in the right direction. I will miss her gentle humor.

Although under 5 feet tall, Sister Marie Dominique was a driving force, always moving forward. When I became Board Member, and eventually President, Sister was always there for me with her quiet advice and encouragement. She understood our role as trustees and our responsibility to make sure donor funds were used wisely for the children. Her history as founder of the orphanage in Kontum in the 60's, through her service on the Board of FVSO, is an incredible story. She helped us establish bonds with the Sisters in Kontum and Pleiku that will forever serve as a foundation for the work we do. I will miss her.

Patrick R Leary



The entire Board would read Sister's prayers before and after each meeting. She was very proud of these prayers and worked hard on them.

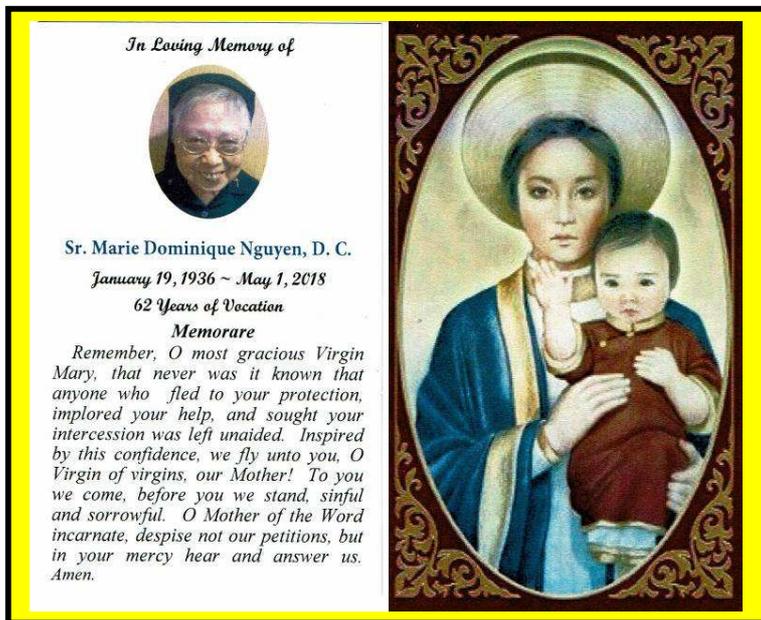
Excerpt from Sister's prayer at the 2017 FVSO Board Meeting

Lord, You lifted upon your own shoulders, the burdens of the poor and the weak; You shunned no leper, no widows, no orphans and turned away from no sinner: Strengthen all of us who seek to grow in love for the orphans, the poor and all those who suffer. Hear us, O Lord! AMEN

SMD

On May 1st, we lost an FVSO founding member and our spiritual leader

On May 1st, we gained an angel who will guide us on behalf of “her orphans”



From Richard Lahey FVSO Board Member

My wife and I attended the Rosary and Mass of the Resurrection last night for Sr. Marie-Dominique. I scanned the rosary and Mass program and her Holy Card so you could all see them.

The chapel was packed for the Rosary and Mass. The sisters had to bring in extra folding chairs. I didn't realize that Sister had such a large family here, but there must have been 40, maybe 50, family members, identified by their white head bands. Her nephew, a priest, came from Vietnam to celebrate the Mass. The Rosary and Mass were in a combination of English and Vietnamese.

After the Mass, there was an opportunity to speak about Sister, so I spoke for a few minutes on behalf of the Board about how much she loved the orphans and how much she helped us as translator, cultural ambassador and guide.

My favorite line from the tributes came from a man who had worked with Sister in her prison ministry in Southern California. "Sister Marie Dominique spoke many languages and was difficult to understand in all of them." That got a big laugh.

Sister Marie began her missionary work with the Montagnards in 1957, and that service lasted 15 years.

Sister's experience led to the formation of the Vinh Son orphanages in Kontum, which eventually supported and directed the development of FVSO and our efforts to raise funds for the children. Below, she describes her interaction with the Montagnards.

I've been blessed to serve the Montagnards during 15 years from 1957-1972. They didn't have schools at that time, the children are in the fields with their parents, playing, catching insects, shooting birds, fishing in the rivers, etc., the olders help their parents in the fields, the little kids play outdoor enjoying the fresh air of nature. They live in small villages, in huts made with straw and thatch. Under their huts they put fire-wood, raise pigs, chickens, a couple of cows or water buffalos. Upstairs is a big room with any separations. Everybody in the family lives in the same room, which is used for cooking, eating, sleeping, working, receiving guests, etc.

So when you come to visit them, you sit on the floor, you smell their food, and other unpleasant odors. You see their torn clothes hanging together on the walls, their blankets on the floor. If you are not bitten by mosquitoes or bugs and other insects, you are lucky. In each hut they put an altar in the middle of the room with a Crucifix, a statue or picture of our Blessed Mother, some rosary beads hanging there. Yes they are poor but very prayerful!

During your visit, they can offer you to taste some of their food or wine, some fruit from their fields. Sometimes they give you a couple chicken eggs, or even a chick! You'll show them your love, your respect, your concern, by tasting their food or accepting their gift! Your attitude shows them your love.

Sister barely survived the TET Offensive

Through many emails between Sr. Marie, Pat McKee and other emerging Friends of Vinh Son directors, an understanding developed on how monetary support might safely reach the orphanages in Kontum. During the fact-finding period (2002 to 2005), Sister also revealed some of her own war-time history. Sister Marie survived for a reason, that all of us at FVSO, along with our benefactors, might make a difference in the lives of hundreds of children. She writes:

There are many orphanages. Since my time serving the Montagnards in Kontum, we had orphanages too. Actually, I was the director of that orphanage, Principal of school, Director of the Technic School for big girls. In April 1968, yes, the Communists took occupation of Kontum people (Vietnamese fled to Saigon, or other towns.

I consecrated my life to die among the Montagnards and stayed with them. The Communists took our place, those inside the house, two other Sisters and myself, a missionary priest with a group of poor Montagnards. We were bombarded with rockets, gunshots, terribly, we almost died. Finally, we were ordered by the National to get out of the house because they were going to bombard the house. So, we run out of the house, passed the Church and got into the Convent across the street, only that short distance under the shooting of both sides. I fainted when I arrived at the gate of the Convent! The Sisters revived me, then I stayed with them one month, very hard and dangerous time.

God did not take me yet. He wants me to live on and do something for His people.

Sister Marie Dominique



I was the first one that made contact with Sister after our second visit to Vietnam in November of 2002. She wrote a letter to me, introducing herself to me, and included a history of her life. She had written several letters or reports about how she started the orphanages in 1957 and worked there until the communists took over in 1972.

Left: Pat McKee (who had received a humanitarian award) presents a check to Sister Marie in 2003.

MY FIRST MEETING WITH SISTER MARIE

We had just returned home after our second visit to the Orphanage in Kontum where we delivered more funds that we had raised on their behalf. It was November of 2002. The nuns in Kontum were in constant contact with Sister Marie who was very actively directing operations there, from Los Angeles.

I received a package in the mail from a Sister Marie Dominique. She sent a prayer bag to me and enclosed a letter of introduction from her. She told me that she had started the Orphanage and was forced to leave Vietnam after the war and that she was a persona non grata in the eyes of the Communists and could not return. She did make a couple of trips much later.

I was traveling to the LA area to see family in December of 2002 and we made arrangements to meet at the convent where she was living. We met at the agreed upon time. Of course, I was struck by her diminutive physical stature, but soon learned as we all did, that she was a giant among us as a humanitarian and a driving force for the Vinh Son Orphanages.

She was one of the truly unique people that you meet during your life. She has made a lasting impression on me and has made a difference in the lives of countless orphans. She will be missed, but never forgotten.

Patrick McKee

Two FVSO Board Members share their memories



Sister's prayers were personal messages

Sister Marie Dominique took great pride in developing original opening and closing prayers for our semi-annual Board meetings. She had deep religious convictions, and prayer generally came easily for her. But, such was not the case with her offerings for our meetings. Sister stressed about her writing and wanted the prayers, which we recited in unison, to be perfect. By perfect, that meant not only through the constructive use of the English language, but also the context had to be perfect in its recognition of the children of Vinh Son and of their caregivers.

Sister never failed to find satisfaction with her prayerful thoughts, and she was truly humbled by making the prayers one of her contributions to our meetings. We will miss her prayerful offerings and her many other insights.

Bart Ruud

A chance meeting with Sister that led me to Vinh Son

I met Sr. Marie-Dominique in the bookstore of a Marian Conference in 1998. She was looking at Spanish-language religious books and seemed to be having difficulty deciding how many she could afford to buy. I went over and introduced myself and offered to buy the books for her. I asked her why she was looking for books in Spanish. She told me that she had a prison ministry in Southern California and that many of the inmates spoke Spanish. She was also studying Spanish herself so she could better minister to them. She chose several books, let me buy them for her to take to the prisoners, and then asked me to let her tell me about "her orphans." The next thing I knew, she was showing me a photo album of orphans in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal who took care of them.

I was too young to have been a Vietnam veteran, had never been to Vietnam, and had never heard of the Montagnard people. So everything she told me was new. We kept in touch after the conference, and I became a donor to the orphans. A few years later she introduced me to some Vietnam veterans, led by David Chaix, who were forming a non-profit organization to support the orphans. I ended up on the Board of Directors. My life has never been the same, and I am very grateful to Sister Marie-Dominique for the opportunity she gave me to do some small good for "her orphans."

Richard Lahey

Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- About 830 Montagnard children live in seven orphanage facilities in the Kontum/Pleiku area, Vietnam
- FVSO is a humanitarian, Non-Profit organization approved by IRS Code 501(c)3. Donations are tax deductible.
- Run by Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St Paul Chartres

Officers

President – Pat Leary
Secretary - Nga Wynne
Treasurer – Ken Tokutomi
Senior VP - Pat McKee
1st VP - Sr. Marie Dominique
2nd VP - Michael Little

Board of Directors

Hank Gonzales
 Rich Lahey
 Clyde Lewandowski
 Bart Ruud
 Dave Chaix
 Colleen Sands
Social Media Advisor
 Sean Grame

Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son

Donations are gratefully accepted year round

\$12 feeds, shelters and educates one child for one month