

March Newsletter 2019

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All photos courtesy of Dave and his Travel Companions
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Dave Chaix's Vinh Son Trip Report, Part 2

With 10 travelers, including 2 first-timers, we embarked on our Vietnam journey.

We began our 3-week 2019 tour in Hanoi, where we met our wonderful guide, Tano. Then, it was off to Ha Long Bay, followed by a flight to Dong Hoi. There, we began our lengthy bus trip that would take us to the orphanages via Dong Ha, Quang Tri, Khe Sanh, Hue, Ba Na Hills, Da Nang, and Hoi An, ending in Kontum and Pleiku. What a great way to see Vietnam!!!

We checked in to our favorite family hotel and spent the evening sorting the 1,000 toothbrushes, toothpaste sent by sponsors, and other goodies brought for the children by the travelers.

The next morning, we were met by Sister Martha, a wonderful woman, and our main translator at all the Vinh Son orphanage locations. Sister Martha traveled with us during our stay in the Kontum area and was an invaluable member of the team.

We began our orphanage visits at Vinh Son 1, greeted by Sister Pier Marie Y Mar. After a welcome ceremony, the children led us on a tour of their home, which is improving year over year. VS-1 is one of the larger facilities, so more time is spent there.

After VS-1, there is always a stopover at the sewing class run by Sister Francisco Sauver Hoat. Here, young girls from the orphanage and outlying villages go through a 2-year program. Gifts were given and handicrafts purchased. Great school for the girls!

Last stop of the day was at VS-2 with Sister Basile Y Ngnat. Sister Basile not only manages VS-2, but also coordinates our dental program in Kontum, where we partner with another non-profit group, Children of Vinh Son. VS-2 is having a serious property ownership issue on their 7-acre parcel of land that they have farmed for 15 years. We were advised that it would take \$7,000 USD to address this problem. That was more funds than we were authorized to spend on this trip, so the request will be brought home to the FVSO Board for consideration.

Dave's report...continued

The next day, we began at VS-6. This facility has really grown and improved over the years. There were two problems given to us by the Sisters. The first one was leaky and detreated water pipes. The cost was \$400 USD which we left to fund the repairs. The other problem is the 50% increase in power costs per month, up from \$100USD to \$150USD per month. This problem will take some investigation, as it was the only orphanage to bring this issue forward.

Onto VS-4 and sister Lien, who operates the third largest Vinh Son orphanage. Here, unfortunately, we encountered a major problem. The drilled well is only producing 1/3 of the water needed to supply the orphanage. Much time discussing this challenge was spent, going over the options, with everyone participating (Tano, our local guide Huynh, Sister Martha, the local Sisters and our travelers). The need here is critical and something needed to be done quickly. With all the best thinking, it was decided to develop an existing spring for water to be used in the bathrooms and for the livestock. The treated water would be re-piped for drinking and cooking. The cost was about \$2,300USD, which was covered by some discretionary funds being carried and donations from the travelers. More to come on this subject.

Next on our itinerary was VS-3 and Sister Gabriel. What a wonderful person. This orphanage is so well managed, but like all of them, there are many needs. Sister Gabriel asked for much needed bicycles so the children could get to school. A donor, Henry Huddleston, had sent funds for 4 bikes, but we soon learned that 12 were required. So, the travelers, plus Tano, pitched in for the purchase of 8 more bikes. What a great group to travel with!!!

After leaving Sister Gabriel, we stopped for lunch, then for our final Vinh Son stop, VS-5. At VS-5, we were greeted by our good friend Sister Marie Kham. Things have been improving at VS-5, which now has internet access. Sister is doing such a great job here!!! The children are happy and always anxious to take the travelers by the hand for a tour. Sister would like to have the pig house moved and will send a cost estimate soon. There is also a need for 2 more toilets.

Time to say good-bye to the Vinh Son Orphanages and Kontum and head down to Sao Mai in Pleiku.

This is always a 2-part visit. The first stop is at the orphanage in town to see Sister Kiet and the children. Sister is in her eighties now, but still active at the orphanage. We also met our friend Ms. Thien. She coordinates our dental program for this orphanage and is a great friend and supporter of FVSO. After a tour with the children, we went to the farm for lunch. This is where the handicapped children live and are cared for so well. We always purchase peanuts here to augment their income and, of course, we enjoy them.

This was another great, productive and emotional visit with the Sisters and children. The fact is, the work goes on...and so will FVSO. We took alot of pictures, some placed in this newsletter, courtesy of Dave and his fellow travel companions. In case you wondered, the lollypops were a huge hit, as seen below!



Vietnam Veteran, Jim McCauley, Shares his Story

This was my first trip back to Vietnam since my DEROS in May 1971. Coincidentally, last month it was almost 50yrs to the day that I arrived in Saigon for the first time, in late January '69. My reactions on landing in country and then traveling to Kontum were, and still are, dichotomous; on one hand, almost nothing looks or feels the same, but on the other hand, the sounds, the smells, the language and the people were all very familiar...like I had been gone just a few weeks.

I have contributed to FVSO for a few years now. I can't recall the first contact but presume it was a result of the ads in VVA Magazine and the Kon Tum connection. I have always held the Montagnard People in high regard for their loyalty, bravery and devotion to family and Tribe. Learning about FVSO and its mission has rekindled those long held feelings. The work being done by Sr. Gabriel, Sr. Martha, and the volunteers is simply phenomenal. The children all seemed happy, were warm, genuinely friendly and delighted to welcome us. The FVSO team, along with the Sisters and caregivers, all contribute to the sense of love and care being shared on a daily basis. Together, they are having a major impact on these children, and I am grateful to join FVSO as a supporter and contributor.

I recommend that any Vietnam Vet, who can make the trip back, do so. The relative freedom of the people, the booming economy and the prospects for their future were all encouraging and left me with a sense that what I had believed in and volunteered for had, in many ways come true. I know all is not perfect, but then again, where is it that the case. At least there is hope for the Vietnamese, and although much more needs to be done to assist the Montagnards and insure their future, support from groups like FVSO give them a chance.

Spreading the Joy



Feeding 850 kids (total for all VS and Sao Mai sites) is no easy task. Everyone old enough eventually works in the kitchen or dining room.





Above left to right: Ken Tokutomi (FVSO Treasurer), Sister Gabriel (Vinh Son 3) and Dave Chaix (Tour Leader)
She would soon have a dozen new bicycles

Enlisting new benefactors

We can help you connect with potential new supporters of the Vinh Son and Sao Mai orphanages.



- Board Members are available to speak at military reunions or to local civilian groups.
- Distribute copies of the monthly FVSO newsletter to your friends and interested groups. Forward the on-line versions and website information via e-mail.
- A Power Point presentation, detailing the FVSO story, is available for your use.
- Tell your personal story. Why are you a member of this team? What would you tell a potential supporter about FVSO? Your history might prompt others to reach out to the children of FVSO.



Legacy Fund Update

The goals are:

\$1.0m by Dec 2020
 \$2.0m by Dec 2025

Total Contributions
\$582,224

Words of Wisdom

“Orphans are easier to ignore before you know their names. They are easier to ignore before you see their faces. It is easier to pretend they’re not real before you hold them in your arms, but once you do, everything changes.”

David Platt

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.
- Orphanages run by Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St Paul Chartres

Officers & Board Members

President	Pat Leary
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2nd VP	Michael Little
3rd VP	Pat McKee
Board	Dave Chaix
Board	Hank Gonzales
Media	Sean Grame

The Kids



Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son

\$12 per month provides each child one nutritious meal every day.

Donations are accepted year round