

# VSO Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage

## May Newsletter 2019 Volume 16 Issue 5

### Contact & Donation Information

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### Clyde Lewandowski (FVSO VP) recently concluded his 11th trip to Vietnam

It is Sunday, April 7, and we are awake early to attend mass at the Kontum Cathedral which is often referred to as "the old wooden church." Mass is at 5:30 and even with this early start time, the church is overflowing with people. With the pews full, people are standing 6 wide on the arched walkway that extends on three sides around the church. We are fortunate that Sister Martha saved seats for us in the back behind the altar which is decorated with a large, colorful woven tapestry. The congregation is primarily indigenous people from the hill tribes. The Viet Kinh (lowland Vietnamese) attend Mass at a different church about a half kilometer away. We are not able to understand a word, but the melody for many of the songs is familiar and everyone joins in to sing Ave Maria toward the end of mass.

Later in the day, we return to the area to visit Vinh Son 1, the orphanage directly behind the church. The Sisters take us by the arm and lead us upstairs to the area where the babies are cared for. As I caution everyone, seeing the little ones will be the most difficult thing we do there. It's not that there is anything wrong with the little ones, but once you see them and hold them in your arms, it becomes very difficult to leave. Many of the travelers comment that they wish they could take the babies home with them.

We have some time to sit and talk with the Nuns. John Browne, one of the travelers in our group, and I sit at a table opposite two older Sisters who are assigned to Vinh Son 1. We soon learn that Sister Pierre Marie Y Mar and Sister Francoise were nurses at the Minh Quy hospital (famously founded and run by Doctor Pat Smith) during the war. John was a SF medic stationed just south of Kontum and was familiar with Minh Quy because he used to take excess medical supplies to the hospital. This is John's first time back to Vietnam, and he is pleasantly surprised to meet the Sisters who he may have known nearly 50 years ago.

In the photo on the right, Clyde can be spotted in the far back, center. He was accompanied on this visit by his wife, Connie, as well as the FVSO Secretary, Nga Wynne, and her husband, Craig. The group totaled 12 people, which included 5 veterans, some of whom brought their wives and sons.

Also pictured are Vinh Son students who currently participate in the FVSO scholarship program that Clyde and Nga Wynne oversee. They extended a grand welcome to the visitors and their benefactors.



## For Clyde and his traveling companions, this visit was more than a basic needs assessment of the orphanages...it was personal

Later, we are invited to the room that is used for daily prayers and events. Most of the college students from Kontum, who receive scholarships from FVSO, are there. They have spent many hours rehearsing for a music and dance presentation to thank us for helping with their education. Y Uen and Y Luin are the MCs with Luin announcing in Vietnamese and Uen translating to English. The students sing, play musical instruments, and dance. As the program progresses, several younger children quietly slip in the back of the room to watch. When Y Luin sings her version of **"You Raise Me Up"** and reaches the stanza **"You raise me up to more than I can be,"** my eyes fill with tears.



At a local restaurant that evening, the 12 travelers pair up with 13 students, Sister Josie, Sister Martha and Sister Imelda, the Superior, as we enjoy a six course meal. Lively conversations ensue as we talk with the students and learn more about each other. Some of the students comment that this is the first time they have ever been to a restaurant. Then, as a special treat, we take them all out for ice cream and give them each a gift of chocolate. **It is one of the most memorable days I have ever experienced.**

None of this would have ever happened without Tano, our guide and close friend, for he is the one who first took me to Kontum and introduced me to the Sisters and the children. I am forever grateful.

Caring for the very young at VS-1 - Sharing joy through music & dance - Enjoying a feast for the first time  
**It's all part of the experience that Clyde's group has brought home with them**



## Scholarship review March/April 2019

3 students graduated from college in 2018. In March, we had 18 students in college. Of the 18 college students, 1 is studying in Saigon, 1 in Qui Nhon, 8 in Gia Lai (Pleiku), and 8 in Kontum.

College students are majoring in Psychology, Nursing, Teaching, Information Technology, Community Service, Travel & Tourism, and Mechanics. There were also 10 high school students in the Don Bosco Tech School - we are supporting 5 of them & the others receive no charge tuition and lodging from the Don Bosco schools.

6 students hope to graduate in September 2019 and 4 more hope to graduate in December 2019. 3 students are supported by individual contributors and the others by our general education fund.

**If you wish to participate, be sure to mark "for education" on your donation check.**



## Byron Pipkin: “I find them in my thoughts often...”

When I began planning to go on the Vietnam trip (Dave Chaix's group) I knew it was going to be an adventure, but I didn't know it would turn out to be such an emotional connection with the people we met – especially the children in the Vinh Son orphanages of Kon Tum.

The heart of the trip was visiting the six Vinh Son orphanages and bringing them dental supplies and blessing them with gifts; but most importantly, bringing ourselves to visit the Sisters and the children in the orphanages. As a first time visitor, I was struck by the smiling faces, warmth and contentment that was apparent in the Sisters and the children at each of the orphanages. Most Americans would say that they had almost “nothing” as far as material possessions went, but it was also clear to me that they possessed a love in their hearts that overflowed to us. Just maybe their lack of “things” allowed them to develop a more significant inward appreciation of the important things in life.

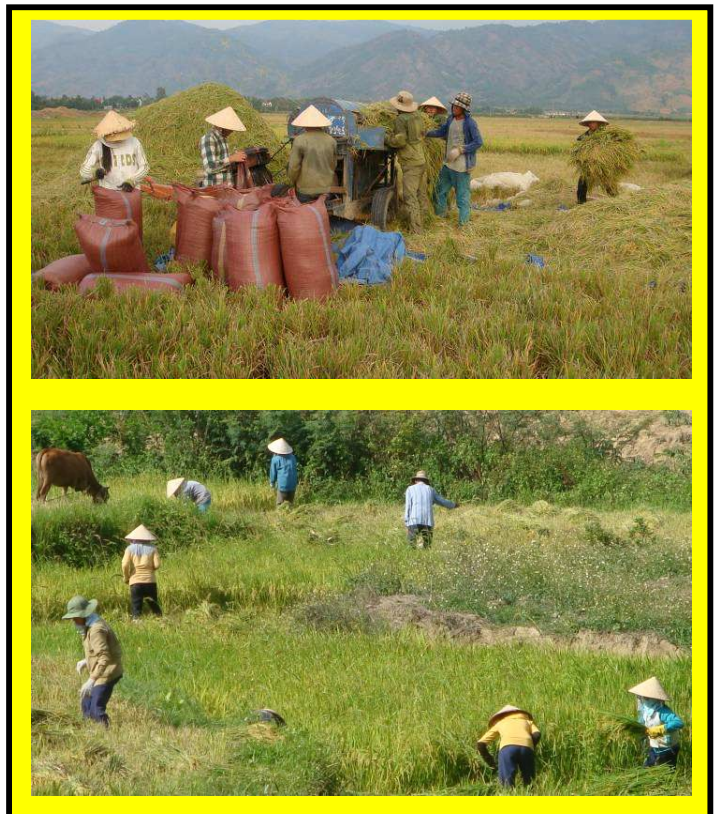
I was also impressed at the cleanliness of the buildings even though they were cooking their food with wood fires – and everyone had a job to do and seemed to be doing it. A couple of the orphanages have over 100 kids to take care of (plus the goats, cows, pigs and fields) and we all know that takes a lot of time – the Sisters do amazing work in keeping everything going! It was obvious to me that all of it can be summarized by saying these kids are well cared for and loved. After visiting six orphanages in two days, I definitely formed a bond and connection to them. Even after being back home several months now, I find them in my thoughts often and want to support them and the work that FVSO began many years ago. It's the least that I can do, and also follows a basic biblical principle noted in James 1:27, that “religion that our God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...”

## FVSO Scholarship Student, A Dien, describes a harvest in poetic terms

In this month in the countryside and rural areas, as we are here, it is also the time when people and families gather together to harvest rice because this month is also the time when the grain has matured at fields in the region of the Central Highlands in general and in the village in particular, the house is crowded with people, asking each other to go to work and go to work, a strange feeling.

Early in the morning, the sun rises, the heat becomes more intense. The immense rice fields stretch and draw in my eye. Rich yellow, warm and covered in copper. Occasionally, a cool breeze brings a gentle scent of ripe rice, very pleasant. The white hats are all busy, bobbing. The sound of sickle, the sound of rice being cut is soothing, noiseless, and there is no rest. The arms swing back and forth quickly. The bundles of rice are lined up neatly, spread into a long row on the field. Where people go, the stubble is always there. Everyone is drenched in sweat on the back of his shirt.

Paddy and bundle gradually move to shore. The young people carry heavy loads and put them on a cart, waiting for a farm vehicle. Very urgently, the trailer is full of rice bundles. Each convoy in turn entangled. The road of the village is in reverse, the traffic is much easier to avoid, because it is the rainy season so everyone must do their best or they will not keep up. However, laughing voices are still cheerful on the lips, so we feel less tired.



These days, I myself realize how hard, exhausting and urgent the work is. But then, I see everyone's radiant faces. The pure smiles of children, the loving smile of youth, the refreshing smile of old age. All blended into the happy laughter of a bumper crop. It has also partly dispelled everyone's fatigue.



You shop. Amazon gives.

If you use **AMAZON** for your shopping, be sure to include us as a Smile partner: **"Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage & Mission, Vietnam,"** It's a great way to help the kids during the Holiday Season or any time of year.  
**Thank-you to those who have included us in their shopping.**

Funds for the banana farm at Vinh Son 1 were provided by John and Sharon Browne. A sign was erected in their honor. The trees are beginning to take shape.



## We can help you enlist new benefactors

- 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

**\$602,890**

*In Loving Memory of*

1 Year  
Later



She is  
Missed

**Sr. Marie Dominique Nguyen, D. C.**

*January 19, 1936 ~ May 1, 2018*

### 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
Secretary	Nga Wynne
Treasurer	Ken Tokutomi
Senior VP	Bart Ruud
1st VP	Clyde Lewandowski
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