

VSO Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanage

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The “Dave Delegation” Rides Again in 2018

It's become an annual trek, Dave Chaix guiding 20 or so adventurers to Southeast Asia. This year was no different. After a 12 day tour of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), Dave took his merry band to Vietnam, where they would experience the main reason for their journey...to bring good will to the Vinh Son and Sao Mai orphanages in Kontum and Pleiku. After a short stay in Saigon, the group flew to the Central Highlands; Dave's report below highlights some of his observations made for FVSO and their supporters. Will there be another trip in 2019? Ask Dave!

We began our site visits with a stop at the Old Wooden Church, a historically impressive landmark in the area, and always an inspirational experience. Its walls have been witness to so much history. After the church visit, we moved on to VS-1 which is geographically located just behind the church. We were cheerfully met by Sister Marie Kham, head of VS-1 and one of our most dependable contacts within the expansive Vinh Son orbit. She is wonderful, and like all the orphanage Sisters, works so hard and is dedicated to the well being of the children. We also intermingled with the children, a favorite activity of the travelers, and toured the facilities. So much progress has been made since my first visit with fellow Board Member, Pat McKee, back in 2001. It's so rewarding to actually see the results of your support.



On the steps of the old Wooden Church, the Dave Delegation takes a well-deserved breather



The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, not touched . . . but are felt in the heart.

Helen Keller

We then drove to VS-2 and met with Sister Thuot, who is the assistant. The lead Sister is Sister Ngat, who was not available at the time of our visit. Sister Jeanne had been the lead Sister since we became involved with VS-2, but is now working with a village about 30 km from Kontum. We toured the facilities and also found them to be on an improving trend.

Next stop was VS-6, located the furthest from Kontum city. We wanted to see the new security wall we funded last year and found it good order and very functional. Sister Nhun was at a meeting, so we met with Sister Ngoc. This orphanage has really improved over the years with our help and the help of others. Sister Ngoc reported that they needed new tables and chairs for the dining room. No problem, we left funds for this project. Photo documentation has already been received. The old tables and chairs were moved to the study room. Sister Ngoc also requested \$5,000 USD to purchase 2 hetacres of land (about 4.9 acres) for farming. We will evaluate this request.

We continued on to VS-4 and found that our good friend, Sister Lien, was working in the fields. We were surprised to find two young men studying for the priesthood, living and working there. This is another facility that has seen great improvement over the years, especially since 2007. The children, who were quite delighted to show us their home, led us through the grounds. We also were able to observe the new security wall that FVSO funded last year. It looked well constructed and we were pleased with the final outcome of the project. Sister Lien had wanted this wall built for some time, and it was always at the top of her wish list.

We had a little trouble finding VS-3, as there is now a new road for this part of Hwy 24. Eventually, we met with Sister Gabriel who is such a wonderful person. She was the head nurse at Dr. Smith's Montagnard Hospital in Kontum during the '60's and does so well with the children. Sister Gabriel led us on a great tour, and treated us to some of her famous homemade banana brandy. Much has been accomplished and continues to be undertaken at VS-3.

The last page of the Trip Report, but not the end of the story

Our last stop was VS-5, where we were greeted by Sister Ly Lan and the children. This is another very remote facility on the other side of the Dak Bla River, across the Golden Gate Bridge. The children here are always excited to play a game with visitors that requires running and chasing, not so easy for us oldies, but always a treat for anyone who dares to participate. Sister Ly Lan reported that she needed computers to help the children with higher education. We left some funds for the purchase, and will follow up to see if we can acquire internet access.

That night, we were treated to a great traditional music show at VS-1 with all the children participating. Also performing was Kaly Tran and his band. Kaly was brought up at VS-1 and is very talented. He can be seen on U Tube at Kaly Band Vietnam.

The next day, it was off to Pleiku and a stop at Sao Mai. Sister Khiet, such a grand lady, met us as we stepped off the bus. Also there to welcome us was our good friend Ms.Thien, who manages the dental program at Sao Mai. Yet another memorable visit was highlighted by entertainment provided by six young boys whose higher education is supported by FVSO. Five are studying to be social workers, interfacing between Montagnard villages and the government, an important task. The sixth boy is studying IT. We also made short visits at the Sao Mai farm, and interacted with the handicapped children.

Our time was up, we left the orphanages behind and began our descent from the Highlands. We started south on Hwy 14 to Ban Me Thout, and Lak Lake for elephant rides. Then, it was on to Saigon to celebrate Tet and the New Year. It was another successful trip, for the travelers as well as the children. Our presence at the orphanages was full of good will, re-established old friendships, and witnessed the positive impact of FVSO. **End of Report**



Top: Dave poses with Y Guan. If you look closely, you can see them together in a much earlier photo.

Bottom: At "Chaix's Lounge" the new tables and chairs at VS-6 make meals more enjoyable at the open-air cafeteria.



A Trong is alive and well, a 15-yr old high school student living in Italy with his adopted family, seen here as a toddler at Vinh Son (left) and a more recent photo taken last year.

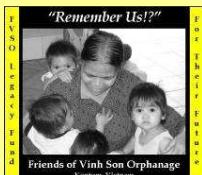


His dad says:
“A handsome boy, he’s a little closed in character. I do think he will return to VN one day to meet his mother.”

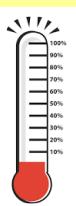


Enlisting new benefactors

We can help you identify new supporters for the Vinh Son and Sao Mai children. Just ask.



Legacy Fund Update
Target is \$2.0m in 10 years
Total contributions to date
\$520,000
% achieved = 26%



Legacy Contributors

- Jim & Jane Gardner
- Henry Huddleston
- Glen Smith
- William Higbee
- Corps Detachment 711

Legacy Contributors

- VVA Chapter 535
-

Long-term supporting organizations

- 189th & 155th Assault Helicopter Companies
- 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion (A and D Companies)
- VN Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada Cnty, CA
- Marine Corps League Detachment 711, Salinas, CA
- Counterparts Association
- 14th Combat Engineer Btn. Association
- MilSpec Tours (800-953-5812)
- Fr. Luke Tran (VN-SHEP) Social Health Education Projects
- Fr. Relihan, Sacred Heart Church, Lone, CA
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Words of Wisdom

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

Francis of Assisi

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©3. Donations are tax deductible.
- Run by Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St Paul Chartres

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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