



A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

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## May 2017 Newsletter - Volume 14 Issue 4



### Help Wanted...Needed!

FVSO has a WEB page and a Facebook page. While we can manage the barebones technology, we still need a creative person with some WEB page skills and Facebook skills to present our message.

You might even branch us out to Twitter and other social media. If you have the creative story telling skills and the desire to help the kids, please contact us. [Info@friendsofvso.org](mailto:Info@friendsofvso.org)

### Back to Vietnam

From April 18<sup>th</sup> to May 1st Pat and Clyde took a trip to Vietnam. The purpose of their trip was to review with the sisters current needs and to get a better understanding of the higher education system in Vietnam. They visited all seven orphanage locations. In addition, they stopped in Ho Chi Minh City and DaNang to visit with some of our charity partners and interview some of the college students we help support. In this issue of the newsletter and subsequent issues, they will provide a more detailed visitation report.

### On-Site Report, Vinh Son and Sao Mai Orphanages, Vietnam

Prepared by Pat Leary and Clyde Lewandowski

April 2017

At the end of April, Clyde and I made a trip to visit the 850 kids and over 100 caregivers at Vinh Son and Sao Mai orphanages. This was Clyde's 10<sup>th</sup> and my 8<sup>th</sup> visit. Each trip is a wonderful experience and a constant learning opportunity. Both Clyde and I served in Vietnam in 1968, and are constantly impressed by the changes made since then. There are so many signs of progress throughout the country. Maybe the most dramatic sign of progress was the Uber motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City .. yup Uber motorbikes!

There are also significant signs of progress at the orphanages thanks to your continued support. Our first hint of progress and a highlight was Sunday at the children's mass in the old Wooden Church. It was a most moving experience. There were some 400+ kids from Vinh Son and another 200 or so from the surrounding community. It was a high mass, so lots of singing. The words to the songs were displayed in the Bahnar language on high def screens located throughout the church. One of our orphan pharmacy school graduates, Y Ly, played the organ while Sister Marie Kham and her staff patrolled the aisles. The kids were remarkably well behaved and sang beautifully, like angels.

For the rest of the 8 days there, we met with the sisters, reviewed the status of old projects and discussed the needs for new projects. We toured all the facilities including dorms, kitchens and bathrooms. The sisters were most gracious and I was lucky enough to score a bottle of Sr. Gabrielle's banana wine. Another sign of progress !

## Images that warm the heart and motivate us to come back again



### Trip report, continued...

I was impressed with the progress the nuns are making in education. They are working hard to get kids to finish high school. This is a most difficult task for a minority in a poverty situation. The high school kids from VS-3,4,5 and 6 go to high school in Kontum during the week, living at VS-1 or VS-2. They return on weekends. Sao Mai has a similar arrangement for their students. As a result, we hope to see more college qualified students next year.

There was also clear progress being made in the dorms and kitchens, diets and medical care. Although the conditions are improving, there is still a long way to go.

There are several things that were apparent to us as we went through our week there. These Sisters and caregivers work incredibly hard. They are up at 4:30 AM to get ready for the day, manage 850 kids all day and retire around 9-10:00 PM...then start all over the next day...365 days a year. Yet, they always have a big smile and plenty of time for us.. Communication is always a challenge. We always have a Vietnamese interpreter with us. Although the sisters speak Vietnamese, it is not their primary language. The official language of the orphanages is Bahnar (one of the largest tribal groups in the Central Highlands). So when we talk, there are two levels of translation going on; English to Vietnamese to Bahnar and then back. It takes a long time and careful discussion to ensure an idea is understood.

We began supporting the orphanages in 2005. Sister Marie Kham, Principle of VS-1, told us that a big part of their success over time has been our presence and support. Although we do not provide 100% of their needs, FVSO has been a constant contributor, reliable during emergencies, and always there for them. That has given the Vinh Son community the confidence to build a solid foundation for the future. What an inspiring thing to hear.





Over the course of the next few newsletters, Clyde and I will recap our visit to each of the 7 orphanages, report on existing projects and talk about future needs and plans.

Each visit is an exciting and rewarding experience when you witness the progress that is being made. Although Clyde and I return to our homes a bit exhausted and worn out, the memories of what we had just seen in the smiles of children are reinvigorating. We are inspired to do more.

**Stay tuned...**

**Below Right:  
Pat and Clyde with Sr Ly Lan of VS-5**

## New bikes for VS-6 generate big smiles



**Two Nuns from each location, along with Sister Superior and Sr Josie (see group photo on page 2), attended an early morning meeting to discuss potential projects. Here is a preliminary list based on priority:**

### Projects

- VS-1..... building for girls classroom and baby patio on second floor. VND 234,903,000
- VS-4 .... security fence between highway and compound VND 74,990,000
- VS-6 .... security fence to keep villagers out. VND 100,000,000 ... detail quote still needed
- VS-5 ... pig pen .....they applied for permit and do not want to build now until permit is approved. They would risk a huge fine or even loose the building and spoil community relations
- VS-3 .... classroom project. This is high on Derek Smith list ... so let him do that.

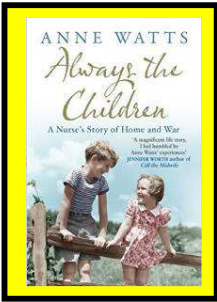
We did discuss two other projects: 1) a new roof for VS-4 bakery and 2) a new mixing machine for the VS-2 bakery. Clyde and I made a SWAG ... and think both will be fairly cheap.

No mention was made of the tractor. They may be satisfied to continue to limp along. Sr Leine and Sr Bernadine still owe us pictures.

**As already mentioned, we'll take a deeper dive into education opportunities and on-site observations in future newsletters.**

## Two book recommendations for your summer reading pleasure

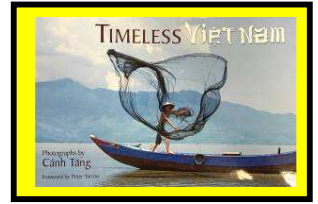
### Always the Children



Anne Watts grew up in a small village in north Wales in the 1940s. She completed her training as a nurse and went on to work in some of the world's most turbulent war zones. She joined the Save the Children Fund, and was posted to Vietnam in 1967. She worked at Pat Smith's hospital in Kontum. **"My 14 months in Kontum were life changing experiences."**

### Timeless Viet Nam

This book introduces the vibrant work of Vietnamese photographer, Canh Tang. Photographs spotlight an ancient culture undiminished by strife or modernism. Each photo is accompanied by a traditional poem that provides a colorful perspective. Timeless Vietnam is a dazzling glimpse of an ancient culture that persists today much as it has for thousands of years.

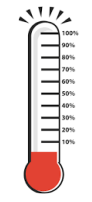


Our partner Viet Dreams is offering Timeless Viet Nam on their web site: [vietdreams.org/store](http://vietdreams.org/store)

Both books are also available at Amazon



**Legacy Fund Update**  
Target is \$2.0m in 10 years  
Total contributions to date  
**\$371,763**  
% achieved = 18.6%



### You can help us guarantee long-term support

1. Donations can be earmarked for the Legacy Fund
2. Donors can leave funds to FVSO in their Estate Planning earmarked to the Legacy Fund
3. Donations of stocks, bonds of property earmarked for the Legacy Fund

### Legacy Contributors

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

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### Long-term supporting organizations

- 189<sup>th</sup> & 155<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Companies
- 227<sup>th</sup> 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
- 14<sup>th</sup> 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
- Rotary Club of San Juan Capistrano, CA

**amazon**smile

Support FVSO by starting your shopping at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)

### Words To Live By

*A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.*

**Forest E. Witcraft**

### Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 830 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St. Paul Chartres
- Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

### Officers

**President** – Pat Leary  
**Secretary** - Open  
**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

### Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son  
  
Donations are gratefully accepted year round  
  
100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers