

July 23, 2007

Second Collection for Vietnamese School

In January 2005, I traveled to Vietnam with friends, one of whom spent her childhood in that beautiful country. It was a magnificent journey, and the Basilica is graced with a statue of Our Lady of Lavang, a Vietnamese apparition of Mary. (She's in the northwest corner of the church, near the wooden sacristy doors.)

In Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), people live in a kind of urban poverty that we cannot imagine. Homes are made of used cardboard, aluminum, wood or tin scraps. Most have no electricity, running water, or plumbing. Children from these families could not afford the government school fees, so there is little hope for an education to break the oppressive chains of poverty. Most of these children would be street children, scraping by just to survive.

Then we traveled to an exceptional school - the Anh Linh Free School (sometimes called the Anh Linh Love School). For those of you familiar with our sister parish/school in North Minneapolis, it reminded me of an Ascension School, but in Vietnam! The school was started about fifteen years ago, and currently educates about 200 students. It is run by Vietnamese Catholic nuns, but is not a religious school and accepts children of all faiths. It is solely funded through private donations. The students attend morning classes, learning regular school subjects, and in the afternoon, they learn marketable skills such as sewing, tailoring and English language. The students also receive uniforms, two meals a day, school supplies, medical and dental exams, haircuts, and plenty of love, attention and stability.

On August 4 and 5, the Basilica will have a second collection to support the Anh Linh Free School. I'll speak to you all about my experiences at this amazing school and share some photos. I hope you will join me in generously supporting this second collection, along with our regular first collection. And thank you for the many ways you create a future full of hope in our world.



Rev. Michael J. O'Connell