

SON KY ORPHANAGE VIETNAM 2008

At the end of January, 2008, some orphans here went to their relative's home for Tet Lunar New Year Festival. The feedback of acquaintances, friends and relatives were remarkably positive about the behavior of these children. They manifested a kind of surprise and admiration before the change in character and personalities of their nephews, after 9 months having lived and educated here, of course in the good sense.

These are some among 52 orphans and street-children belonging to Son Ky Orphanage, under the care of Mr. Nguyen Duc Manh, Fr. Vincent Nguyen Van Hung, Fr. Paul Pham Minh Thanh and Ms. Bui Thi Mai Lien. Together with them, closer to the boys are 5 young aspirants, who in the same time learn the work to become future educators and to assist the orphans 24 hours a day.

On August, 2005, we have started with 7 double orphans and single orphans at Tam Thon Hiep, Can Gio Island, HCM City. Due to problems about the jurisdictional difficulties caused by the local government, on June 2007, we had to move most of them, and received more new ones and up to now, we are gathering in this Son Ky Orphanage 49 orphans and street-children, aged from 8 to 18.

We did this, because we are convinced that this part of population is the most vulnerable one in the society. We often see the resulting bad side of the society without making effort to solve the cause of it. Orphans are often disobedient, indisciplinable and uncorrectable. Poverty is at the root of the problem. Parentless orphans are left to the mercy of old grandparents or relatives who consider them as burden to be removed at the first occasion. Most of them have to return for what they get to survive by hard manual labor. For that reason, most of them are drop-outs. Many have been deeply falling into bad habits or bad companions. They are now the cause of trouble for families, anxiety for local place and the threat for the future society. These children are in no way bad only for themselves. They are most influential and seducing other children into evil doing. The older they get, the more disastrous will be the influence they exert on others their age.

Authority in all levels usually are confronted with bad consequences. Police, prisons and violence are mostly sought and used to be solution for the problem. But this causes more problems and in no way helps to effectively solving the problems.

In our orphanage, these orphans are changing into better boys is a fact. The first things they learned when coming here is to struggle with themselves to become not only good, but very good persons. They have been taught the common virtues to become good, responsible and respectable people. They have been taught and trained to become good Vietnamese people, accepted and respected by neighbors, relatives and the society in the future. They are taught to know how to have the best actions and doings in whatever situation. Many Biblical values as well as Vietnamese traditional ones are presented to them as the highest values in life.

In order that children in this family orphanage could get a good education and be improved in their living style, they must be living in the ambiance, rich with educative values, most appropriate to raise up one's personality. We give the first priority for boys, from 9 to 12. In Vietnam, this category

occupies not less than 8% of the total population, in which about 12% are abandoned orphans and street-children. They are not cared by the government, left for the mercy and efforts of religious bodies and private social workers. The Communist government has changed much its attitude about this. Before, because of an unjust prejudice against all religions, because of the most unfounded fear of losing prestige, if the truth and reality about Communism could be revealed, they developed a strategy of oppression and persecution, allowing no religious body or private persons any freedom to do humanitarian work. This bad situation, thanks to political pressure from foreign countries, has been remarkably changed. The presence of this orphanage as well as many other social institutes is much due to this situation.

The process for education consists in three periods:

The process of re-habilitation and adaptation: from 9 to 13 years old, a boy admitted here has to adapt himself into the good ambiance of this house. No matter how were they before they came here, they changed remarkably, as if it was impossible for them to continue the past way, when in here, everybody are doing good, nobody agrees with their way of doing and badly living their lives. If they do not act in the same way as others, they feel themselves to be eliminated from the community, even if nobody eliminates them. They oblige themselves to do as others, and to follow the good examples given by others around them. When in a community, everybody feels obliged to live and act like that, a very good ambiance is then attained which is so useful in helping all members to be good.

The process of maturation: we decided for students of eighth and ninth grades to be specially trained to gain maturity. They are often assigned to fulfill relatively long-term tasks, to gain perseverance, diligence and faithfulness with one's obligations and duties. They have to learn to respect others, and develop virtues needed for the common life: humility, understanding, easiness in forgiving others, readiness in doing tasks to build up a good and loving community. They are taught to serve others more than looking to be served, to give more than to receive.

The process of responsibility and leadership: at the age 16, when they go to upper secondary level, they are often charged with more important responsibilities: they have to care for the family sanitation, the studying atmosphere in the family, the discipline in the house. Someone has to take care of watching over some younger brothers, teaching the weak. Someone has to take charge of the computer training, of repairing the bicycles. For some, we entrust the water system, or the electric system to care about. At this age, many boys are afforded with the vocational training, like computer technology, electronics or domestic electricity.

The process of specification: after their graduation from upper secondary level, we will provide orphan students with two more years to further a specification in an appropriate branch. Many will deepen English, computer or an academic subject, so that they will be able to contribute their parts as good and well trained teachers and educators for the future generations of orphans. Many boys have a very firm orientation to co-operate with us in the future to realize this program to serve orphans and street-children.

All in all, we have chosen English and computer as two strong orientated expertises for this orphanage. We will do our utmost, so that any boy, before his graduation from here, can use English and computer quite well, so that this could become a big profit for his future, no matter what job or career he will do

later on. Up to now, we have succeeded in creating an ambiance, in which the bigger boys are willing to speak English among themselves, as their first foreign language. This is a great encouragement for everybody in the family to realize our dream.

This looks so incredible, if we do not imply love in all this. How can we succeed with so remarkable results, with so much persistent good effects? The secret is that we do not only love these orphans, but we have made them to be firmly convinced that they are loved. More than anyone else in the society, these children need love. They are very sensitive about the way people treat them. The saying: “What matters is not what you give, but how you give” implies here most perfectly. The element which makes the educator succeed depends on how much do the educated feel themselves to be loved. In this family, the orphans have a father whom they are convinced to be ready at any moment to offer his life for their sake. They trust this man completely. In all his undertakings, his activities, his teachings, his exhortations, his going-out to look for money supporting them, or even his rest, his prayers . . . are seen no more than what he is doing for them, because of them, for their goodness, for their sake. No wonder why the children respond so well to what we ask them to do, to change their behavior. They want to show their gratitude, they want to return the good they have received. They do not know what to do, but they fervently wish to be good, so that they can please the one who loves them so much, the one who could die for them.

While making no distinction in admitting children here, in terms of religions, cultures (even children of ethnic minority are admitted), levels of academic achievement, Buddhist and Catholic followers are encouraged to live according to their belief, to practice Buddha’s Teachings or Biblical Principles and Spirit. We even teach them to trust God and to unite closely with Him, to find moral strength to live a decent and worthy life. Many children have found religions a strong base for their moral life, to become good and honest people, ready to fulfill their own duties, but willing to help others as well. They feel that in their religions, they are loved by Buddha or God.

In this loving atmosphere, everything is possible. We dare to give them the ideal to become, not only good people, but very, very good persons, not only in the future, but even right now, right today, this moment, in this place. We ask them not to think about themselves alone, but about others. They have not to stop asking themselves, what can they do for others, to serve others when needed, or simply, to make others happy. To our amazement, they do this so miraculously. It’s true, with love given and received, we are doing great things, and we are experiencing great things here, in terms of educating the must-be-spoiled children.

This is only one marvelous thing. There are some others, worthy to be mentioned. We want to recall in the first place, the aspiration of these children to become good and valuable persons in the future. I see in no way this as a normal orphanage, in which we educate children for some limited periods of time, then send them back to the society. Here they are called and invited to stay, to become social workers, educators and teachers for future generations of orphans who will follow them in coming here. Most of them take this very seriously. We give them a quite strict and serious time-table for studying, and they are so willing in accepting and heading into serious studying. Many of them were drop-outs, or simply lost the capacity to learn, to understand, to accumulate sciences and knowledge, now in less than a year, they have succeeded in taking most of the academic subjects very seriously. They do this, because most of them are quite clear in the orientation for their future: many want to be educators to return what they are receiving so gratuitously now. This is not only something abstract, but something

real which influences their thinking, their action and way of living. So with time, we hope we can solve the problem of heredity or continuity of this program, and contribute our part in solving the problem of orphans.

It is natural for children everywhere to be naughty, to be inconsiderate, to cause troubles, to be noisy and disturbing, to be indisciplinable. But when they feel beloved, this mischief is seen so differently. They are not hated for all these. It is precisely that love accepts everything, forgives everything, corrects everything in an utmost patience. Children educated in this way do not need to be punished. Here, we never have to use violence or make children fear. They themselves are aware of their mischief and most often, they come to the educator to denounce themselves, to show repentance and ask for a punishment. This repentance is in no way theatrical, but a sincere expression from the bottom of their hearts. In their hard labor teaching and educating children, these are the happiest moments in the life of the educators who dedicate themselves for the sake of this most unfortunate and vulnerable part of the society.

I am Jerome Nguyen Duc Manh, the founder of this orphanage which I hope to be the model of many others to come, to serve the good of young orphans in the future. I have sworn seriously to dedicate my life only for them. For them, I work. For them, I study. For them, I make the campaign to raise fund to build up orphanages and to feed as many orphans and street-children as possible. For them, I will dedicate all my energies, times and all my life. I will live and die for them. For their sake, I will make my best to train successors to continue my work. Together we shall form a team, or a community, to serve this great cause. This will be one of the most important tasks while I am still living. From my heart of hearts, I wish that the children I am educating and appealing now, will be the future successors of my work.

The more I launch myself in this work, the more I am convinced that I am not alone in doing it. I really wish to have more sympathizers, more co-operators who will be ready to contribute their parts in fulfilling this program, so that many abandoned and marginalized orphans could be gathered in love, admitted and educated, to change into good and valuable persons in the future. Small but persistent gifts coming from different sources tell us that we are not alone. Many people understand the value of our service, appreciate it and wish to contribute their part to make this society a worthier place to live, for this most vulnerable part of the population.

This service is so good that we wish to multiply it for more and more orphans, and we wish to enlarge it into many different poorest and miserable places throughout this country. We hope that this could be done in the years to come. But for the time being, we need the support to provide lodging and food for 50 orphans who once being good and capable persons will help to further the education and feeding the future generations of this unfortunate category of children in the society.

The situation of the orphan problem is so urgent. We receive urgent calls from everywhere to admit and assist. Uncountable abandoned and marginalized orphans are at the prey of the dark forces in the society. They shout at us, to bring them support before it will be too late.