

For the last 11 years Father Tien Tran has been in the habit of helping those who need it most. Each year the All Saints Church pastor goes on a medical mission trip, bringing with him supplies and equipment to Vietnam to treat people who wouldn't get it otherwise.

"It was wonderful," said Father Tran of the most recent trip, the 11th installment of the trek to Vietnam. "It all started at the cathedral while I was an assistant, and I had mentioned to Dr. David Neima that Vietnam was in great need."

As it turned out, Dr. Neima had been involved in helping poor countries with medical treatment, and liked the idea of going there.

That conversation resulted in Father Tran and Dr. Neima traveling to Vietnam to bring medical aid, and 11 years later the dynamic duo took a team of 26 people, the largest ever, on the trip.

Doctors, Nurses, and Dentists all went, bringing with them medical supplies and equipment to do everything from cataract surgery to tooth extractions.

"Every year the group is growing," said Father Tran. "This year we worked for two weeks and divided into two groups and treated 5000 people."

Each year the trip is made, Father Tran says they go with two distinct purposes, "to equip the hospitals with proper equipment, and to transfer skill, and teach them how to use the equipment," he says.

Unfortunately, not everyone who needs medical treatment in the area can manage to get to the hospital or clinic where it is taking place. To compensate, the medical mission brings the treatment to them.

"We also do outreach camps, which basically means it is not in a hospital, we use churches, schools, and medical clinics."

Despite the outreach camps, some locals travel for hours to get treatment.

"Some of them are from the mountains and the jungle and make the trip down, it would often be a day long trip for them."

For the people that make the trip, their basic needs are provided for as they are given rice, milk, and sugar.

Father Tran said the trip isn't just about providing the physical needs of the people in Vietnam however, it is also about helping the people who come along for the trip.

“The most important thing I expected is that the doctors and nurses come back with a different perspective of life,” he said. “The team members are affected, they come back with a different perspective of the poor.”

“We’ve even had conversions.”

Amazingly, the people who participated in the medical mission paid their own way: for everything from travel to hotel and food. To many, the \$2500-\$3000 pricetag coupled with the prospect of traveling half way around the world to a foreign country may seem daunting, but Father Tran said the mission went very well, and was well worth the money for the people who went.

Recently, the government in Vietnam has recognized the incredible work that Catholics are doing in the area. Not only is the medical team allowed to enter into the country with all of their equipment and medication, the local sisters are permitted to start treating patients as well.

Father Tran said, “slowly they are allowing some sisters to start medical clinics to help the poor but hospitals cannot be made yet.”

Father Tran also says that there have been a few cases where the team has come across children with heart problems. The team is unable to do heart surgery, but provides the \$2000 necessary to do the operation, and in the past 11 years Father Tran’s group has been able to save twenty children from dying.

“We give them money for heart operations, and the families are so grateful because their children would have been dead soon. Also, if we get asked for money here for heart surgery, we send it back.”

Understandably, the patients who are helped by the medical team are dumbfounded by their generosity.

“The patients are so happy to be treated by us, and they receive it totally free,” said Father Tran. “It’s like a miracle to them.”

Naturally, patients end up asking why they are doing what they are doing, and Father Tran says when people ask, he is more than happy to tell them.

“We do this because of what we received from God and have come to share it,” he said. “Once they see what we do and they ask, we tell them, in that sense we evangelize.”

In the past engineers, teachers and students have also made the trip, and people have brought children as young as 10 years old along for the ride.

Father Tran says next years trip is already in the works, starting with a fundraising dinner with proceeds that will go directly to the people in Vietnam.

“For next year we are planning on July, and we are planning on having a fundraising dinner after Easter.”

He is now looking for people who are willing to support the trip financially, or willing to make the trek to Vietnam themselves to help out.

Father Tran can be reached at frtran@hotmail.com, and cheques for the trip can be made payable to EMAS – Vietnam Project C/O Dr. David Neima, #204 625 5th Avenue, New Westminster BC, V3M 1X4. The group also accepts Visa and Mastercard and issues tax receipts for donations exceeding \$20.