

## **VIETNAM Children With Heart Problems Benefit From Catholic Nuns' Efforts**

HUE, Vietnam (UCAN) -- Catholic nuns and foreign benefactors are helping children with heart diseases undergo surgery their families would not otherwise be able to afford.

"We are extremely grateful to the nuns for their financial help, because we could not afford the operation even if we had sold our house, farm and motorbike," said Nguyen Dinh Thieu, whose 9-year-old daughter underwent an operation in May to rectify a heart valve.

The operation, which cost 42 million dong (about US\$2,600), was covered by Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation nuns in [Hue](#), 660 kilometers south of Ha Noi.

Thieu, who is not a Catholic, expressed hope that his daughter, a third-grader, would be able to go back to school soon. The father of four told UCA News he earns about 30,000 dong a day as a motorcycle taxi driver, and his wife earns 7 million dong a year growing rice on 2,000 square meters of land they rent from the local agricultural cooperative. They live near Kim Doi village.

Before their daughter's operation in a state-run hospital in Hue, about 10 kilometers away, he had sold his motorbike for 2 million dong and borrowed another 3 million to cover her medical expenses, he recounted. Then a Catholic neighbor recommended him to the nuns. Other people offered money to pay off his debt, he added.

Sister Anna Le Thi Hue, one of three nuns running the project, said they have been helping children with heart problems since 2002, when a Catholic family asked 20 million dong for their child's heart operation. That family belongs to the parish based in Kim Doi. The three nuns, who are stationed in the parish, prayed and wrote domestic and foreign benefactors for help, the local superior told UCA News.

"We are lucky that Father Antoine Tran Manh Tien, a Vietnamese priest who lives in Canada, covered the cost," she continued. The priest asked benefactors to provide financial support to the nuns. From that start, they have helped 125 children who required heart surgery, only 13 of them Catholics, Sister Hue said. The children, ranging in age from 1 month to 15 years, have come from seven central provinces.

The nuns give from 15 million to 50 million dong for each operation.

Families in the Kim Doi area are very poor, especially those with more than two children, Sister Hue explained. Typically, they eke out a living growing rice and vegetables and selling recycled items. The better-off families, though still poor, earn extra income from bricklaying and carpentry jobs.

Sister Hue said local government authorities, health-care centers or parish priests recommend heart patients to them. They then supply Father Tien with the patients' case records and photos so he can solicit donations.

The nuns also visit and give gifts and clothes to patients at home or in the hospital, she

added.

Sister Hue said they help all regardless of religion "because our spirituality is to live among and for people of other beliefs and evangelize."

Thai Thi Thanh Tuyen, a Buddhist, told UCA News her 4-year-old son had a heart operation on May 25 that cost 25 million dong. Her family could afford only 10 million, and the nuns helped cover the rest, she added.

Tuyen said she had been taking her son to Hue for monthly medical checkups for a year, spending 2 million dong each time. She considers herself lucky to have met Sister Hue at the hospital, where the nun was visiting a sick child.

Hoang Thi Thai, a sixth grader, recently underwent a heart operation. Before that she would often feel faint, she told UCA News. Thai said she was grateful to the nuns and hopes to be healthy and back in school for the start of the next academic year in September.

Sister Hue said her congregation in Hue also runs day nurseries for children from poor families, conducts sewing courses for women, provides health care for poor patients and takes in unwanted pregnant women.

Founded in 1924 in the city, once Vietnam's imperial capital, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation have 147 professed nuns, 26 novices, eight postulants and 158 aspirants.

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