

Vietnam

Mission Trip – February 6-22, 2009

It all started when Fr. Paul Bui asked us to come to Vietnam on mission work. I think I said “yes” but a lot of thoughts went through my mind. I prayed to discern what this trip would be like. When I booked my time off from my office, to my surprise, everybody was so happy for me about this trip. My family was very supportive and I thank God that He put everything in place for me to go.

We left on Feb 6 at midnight and had a comfortable flight. Fr. Tien Tran has been organizing these trips with various healthcare providers for the last 15 years. He called us “The Chilliwack Team”: Shirley, Tita, Doreen, Pat and me. Fr. Tien Tran, Fr. Long Vu and Fr. Paul Bui were our spiritual leaders but were also very organized tourist guides. We had no concerns of any kind during the trip.

First, we were encouraged to get to know our team members. Of course, I was part of the Dental Team. I met with Hoa, a nurse who took care of brain injury patients in Duke’s Hospital in the States. There was also Marguerite, a retired nurse, and Ellen, a secretary from EMAS.

Through the two weeks, I got to talk and get to know them as friends, not just coworkers. God gave me their support and skills as tools to help me in treating these patients. Throughout my days, we would see around 30 patients, young and old, who had suffered many years of pain that had slowly become abscesses and decay and gum disease. (Vietnamese: “Dau” means pain – the word I learned the most on this trip)

It struck me that so much suffering could have been prevented if the tooth was treated in the early stages of the disease. Also, I was surprised by the unawareness that the “black spots” on their teeth were caused by sugar. Parents often asked Hoa, our nurse, and the translator if the anesthetic would make “their kids go crazy”. They were so surprised that with the freezing, it didn’t hurt to pull their teeth.

Repeatedly, we found that we could not communicate with them. But throughout the day, Marguerite by my side, sang “Ave Maria” for the patient to reassure them as they were very scared. I have to say that that helped me get through my own nervousness. What we could do for these people was so minimal. But since love and prayers were with us as we treated these people, we, as part of the Body of Christ, transcended His love to our brothers and sisters in Vietnam. It gave us great joy.

On this trip, we started everyday with Mass at 6:15 a.m. The Gospel that was read to us was from Genesis. Fr. Tran prayed in thanksgiving daily for each new day. He told us, “Our trip is like those 7 days of creation. We are given in this new day, the power to extend the work of our Creator. We are given so much that even our Creator trusts us with his creation.”

I am grateful to have been on this trip. I met many beautiful people, team members, patients, priests, nuns, beautiful scenery, and warm weather. We were spoiled with great Vietnamese food, friendship, great hospitality and gratitude. Now as I return to my everyday life, I have become aware of my connection to countries like Vietnam through the beautiful goods that we see in our stores. They were made with great skill by hard-working persons for very little money. I ask my husband, what can we do to help these countries to better their circumstances? He said, Support Fair Trade, and support dignity in the work place.

Thanks you very much.

Miriam