



Message from Fr Shea

When people express admiration at the efficient running of Sarnelli House (all 6 houses, plus the farming projects) and render praise unto me, I feel embarrassed. Because the success is not due to my work but to the selfless dedication and sacrifice of our staff. All our workers do what has to be done. They tend to the kids; do the necessary purchasing; and often work beyond their scheduled hours to make sure everything is finished and the children's needs are fulfilled. The office staff works hard with not only taking care of the financial books, but being mentors for the older girls, organising functions for the children and making travel appointments for guests. They are the purchasing agents as well. The head housemothers of each of the 6 houses join together in the grocery shopping and help each other work together to solve problems. Charlene Richard House (our 6 bedroom guesthouse) also has a staff which cooks cleans and often takes guests on sightseeing and shopping trips.

I have now been joined by Fr Puwanai and Brother Keng, who also work at different jobs. Fr Ole will be pastor of 3 parishes, plus is learning the ropes to take over the directorship of Sarnelli House. Brother Keng is our counsellor for the kids and also teaches in the minor seminary in Ta Kaek, Laos.

As for me I am facing my 75th birthday, and will hopefully hang in for a while, helping at whatever I can, and especially finishing the work on developing our farm. The Good Lord has to be praised in His Blessings and Love for our work. We pray the Holy Spirit continues to guide the staff and care for the children.

Fr Mike Shea C.S.s.R

Behind the Scenes

Farming and Child Care - a Double Act

Ms Peh has been working as the head house mother of the House of Hope for almost 10 years. She has nursed, settled and cared for many a little one, some as young as 1 day old who had been abandoned to the House of Hope. Peh dispenses common sense and a fierce and loyal love to the children in her care, while at the same time settling disputes with disgruntled toddlers and detecting rising fevers and the first signs of chicken pox. Peh was born in the village of Vienghuk and she was 16 years old and working as a scullery maid for the nuns when Fr Shea met her and she came to work for him. One of the other skills of Peh is her penchant for farming and for trying to make Sarnelli House as self sufficient as possible. Together with other members of



Peh with the first calf born on Jomp's Farm

the Sarnelli House staff, Peh proposed the idea to Fr Shea to support those children at Sarnelli House who would not be able to find a job or live independently because of psychological and physical problems caused by HIV/AIDS. Jomp's Farm was a result of that idea. It is for those teenage boys so they have a life when they are older and can work the land and care for the livestock. Money is currently being raised to build them a bunk house to live in, and there are 2 established families living



and working on Jomp's Farm to help the boys learn their work and to support them living there.

The total amount of land belonging to Sarnelli House and used for farming activities is 85 rai or 33 acres. Using Fr Shea's inbuilt Wisconsin farming knowledge, Peh has overseen the buying of all the livestock – fish for the 5 fish ponds, chickens, ducks and 28 pigs. She is now midwife to 10 cows, 3 have calved with her looking on in approval and delight. The coops and pens for the animals have been constructed under her direction and the choice of vegetables and fruit to be planted her decision. Equipment needed for the farm work has been purchased by Peh and Ms Jit (another dedicated staff member who is manager of Jan and Oscar House) from generous donors and includes machinery like the



mechanical rice planter, a tractor and a rice mill. As much of the land in the northeast has been over farmed and depleted of minerals for many years Peh's latest project is to develop organic fertiliser that will sustain the land now and into the future. The older boys from St Patrick's and Jan and Oscar House are put to work every week turning over putrid smelling cow manure and other organic matter to get it to the ripe stage of being able to load it into the fertiliser machine. This will spit out fertiliser pellets to enable the easy delivery of fertiliser to the fields.



Another project which is experimental and that Peh is currently working on aims to generate income for Sarnelli House by growing and selling black rice which is more healthy and sells at a better price than the regular rice. It has been planted in the readymade cement containers on the front farm. They can be irrigated by hand, and will hopefully yield 4 crops of rice a year that can be sold. In between farming projects and nursing babies, every Monday on Peh's day off, and in the early mornings and evenings Peh will belt out jazz, rock and roll, easy listening, Thai pop and instrumental classics from her outdoor sound system beside her house in the village of Don Wai. Everyone knows when Peh is home and what sort of mood she is in as her music shatters the 6am silence or interrupts the call of the evening cicadas when the sun is setting. Her dedicated life revolves around the children and the rural life of Don Wai.

Our Newest Staff Big Boy

Boy Yai is now 21 years old. He has finished his education, has his first job and is now the proud owner of a brand new Honda motorbike which he is paying off over 3 years. Boy Yai (literally translated as Boy Big), has been living at St Patrick's Boys Home since he was given to Fr Shea when he was 10 years old from the Friends for all Children Foundation in Bangkok. He had been abandoned as a baby, and was unable to be adopted because of his low IQ. Boy has grown into a happy 6 foot 2 inch man and although he started out with behavioural problems; he went through a phase of pulling down his



pants when he was stressed but thankfully that period is over, and he was bullied and teased, he has overcome these problems with the help of medication, acceptance and much love. He would probably have been diagnosed with a type of Autism when he was a child and because of this Mrs Wan the manager of St Patrick's Home, seeing his limitations immediately took Boy Yai under her wing and bought him up by herself. Now as she gets older, he looks after her with all the love of a son for his mother. Apart from talking to himself occasionally and jumping up and down on the spot when he gets



St Patrick's Boys Home

excited he is much more relaxed. Boy's first paying job as a staff member of Sarnelli House started at the end of last year. He picks up guests who arrive by plane at Udon Thani airport and with Wit the driver, transports them safely to Charlene House. Invariably Boy arrives at Sarnelli House to eagerly await the driver at least 2 hours before he needs to leave and he excitedly tells anyone he encounters where he is going, what time the flight is expected in, and what the flight number is. For the pickup Boy wears his best clothes and carries the Sarnelli House sign to alert visitors. When they recognise the sign he swoops on them with outstretched hand to take their luggage and he recites "Welcome to Sarnelli House" in English and proceeds to march them out of the airport to the waiting van. There is no time to chat and linger as Boy has a job to do and getting the guests into the van and out of the airport homeward bound is the goal. However a favourite treat is to eat a hot dog from one of the airport shops. For guests or staff in the know Boy's gratitude and excitement are utterly joyous. Boy has a passion for numbers and order, and on a once in a lifetime trip to Koh Samui in 2012 Boy and 11 other children caught a flight from Udon Thani to Bangkok and from Bangkok to Surat Thani. They spent 10 days on the island of Samui experiencing a part of Thailand they had never dreamt of seeing. For Boy the most memorable and exciting time of the trip was not jet skiing or eating pizza or bowling but confirming the number of gates and the type of planes arriving at Suvarnabhumi airport in Bangkok.

Fr Ole

Fr Puwanai Tantikun also known as Fr Ole has been ordained a Thai Redemptorist priest since May 2011. He started work at Sarnelli House in May 2012. He is from Chonburi in central Thailand, Fr Ole's father is Catholic and his mother is Buddhist and he is the youngest of 5 siblings. Fr Ole entered the seminary when he was 12 years old. As part of his formation he spent 4 years studying theology in Davao in the Philippines. Unlike many young Thai priests he took 3 years off to experience the world away from the seminary, and he worked in the financial departments of some big international hotels in Bangkok. Fr Ole's connections with Sarnelli House go back to the very early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. He was studying as a novice in Nongkhai when Fr Shea was the novice master and he joined, along with other novices the beginnings of the Outreach Program. Together they tried to alleviate some of the destruction and suffering that untreated HIV/AIDS was causing among the people of the surrounding villages. Now Fr Ole has come back to an improved public health situation, and his gentleness and sensitivity have given him a great start to continue the work of Fr Shea at Sarnelli House.



Brother Keng



Fr Ole, Ms Peh, Fr Shea, Br Keng and Ben Ummels from The Netherlands

Brother Keng is a young man originally from the province of Nongkhai, he went to school at Rosario School in Viengkhu and knows many of the Sarnelli staff from his school days. Br Keng comes from a large family of Vietnamese Catholics who escaped to Thailand during the Vietnam war and settled in the northeast of Thailand. Brother Keng was professed a Redemptorist brother in 2008 and has completed a Masters degree in Counselling, which makes him ideal for living and working with the children of Sarnelli House- especially all those embarking on their turbulent teenage years. Br Keng is a great one for organising events and once he has the microphone in his hand he can get the kids motivated and involved in all sorts of activities. One of his projects is focussing on the career choices of the teenagers and helping them to decide what they want to study and where when they graduate from Rosario School.

Staff like all those mentioned and many more are the back bone and the strength of Sarnelli House. Their dedication along with the support of all our sponsors, friends and donors helps to smooth the way for the children to learn and live and love and to make Sarnelli House a family that welcomes all.

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Written by Kate Introna, February 2013