

# Sarnelli House

## NEWSLETTER



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# 2014 MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!!



The year 2014 was kind of an epic year for me. July 2 was the fiftieth anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood, and August 2 was the 55th year of my vows as a Redemptorist. Knowing I was a little long in the tooth (76 years old), and most of the people at that ordination were gone, I decided to celebrate quietly. That was not to be the case. Fr. Joe Ole had arranged a celebration at the annual Church feast at Pai Si Tong, with the Bishop and many other priests, plus a huge influx of folks from my parishes of yesteryear. It was a glorious time. Then, the Redemptorists had a big Mass in Bangkok for two lads celebrating 60 years; myself at 50; and others at 25 years, plus Fr. Johnny Phairot's 40 years as a Redemptorist. A few short weeks later, the bishop of Udorn, Joseph Lurchai, held a big celebration for the Redemptorists and the other religious and diocesan priests, for our various years of service in Thailand.

When I went home, my brother and sister demanded I celebrate. My private thought on this subject was "Who the hell goes to these celebrations anymore?" The parish church, (a new mega-type church had their own Sunday liturgies) so I choose a church closed by the archdiocese, named St. Michael's, in the Kettle Moraine State Forest near Parnell WI. It was the church of

my grandmother, Mae Bowser O'Connor, and I had a lot of relatives and friends buried there. My sister Brigid had sent out invitations, and some people also asked if they could come (we did not have their addresses to invite), and on a glorious Sunday morning, we had 425 folks attend the Mass, plus priest friends. Fr. Jim Shea gave a great homily-roast, and it was all done outside, under a huge tent. The members of the old Our Lady of Angels choir joined together, and made themselves proud with some great liturgy. I have to thank my brother Kevin, my sister Brigid and her husband Admiral Steve Johnson, and my big O'Connor clan for all the work they did, together with the Gergens' Golden Girls tabernacle Choir! I never knew I had that many friends!

Enough about me. Here at Sarnelli House, we had another blessed year without losing any child to the ravages of HIV/AIDS. Fr. Joe Ole and Brother Keng came into their own this year; dividing up work and making my life so much easier. Brother Dtic was here for 6 months, but then was transferred to the Pattaya community, which has its own houses for abandoned and orphaned children. Fr. Chuck Beierwaltes was here for three months to work on the sponsorship program, and enjoyed the kids as much as they enjoyed him. Our nurse, Kate Introna, continued to amaze us all with her clinic work with ill patients; and her work on the Outreach Program with Brother Keng. She is a mother and an older sister to all





the kids, and spends as much time with them as possible. She also writes project for grants from various agencies and foundations, plus writing her Newsletter.

We saw many kids leave this year; most of them from graduation. Some took off with boys to find their fame and fortune. But just as it looked like we could start drawing back on some projects, June to November saw a huge influx of kids. Newly born babies; little people orphaned or abandoned by their parents; girls molested and raped and given to us by the Thai Courts and Thai Welfare Services. (The government does not give us a cent for the education and upkeep of these kids, and this is why we keep rattling our tin cup). Although three of the babies were later re-claimed by relatives, we still have two new babies at the House of Hope.

I bought more rice paddy land, and the kids and workers planted all the rice. But, as usual, the monsoons started late and ended early. Two years ago, I had dug two huge water reservoirs, so we pumped out the fish ponds onto the rice paddies; collected the big fish, and then pumped from the reservoirs back into the fish ponds. Next year, we are going to change to short growth-big yield rice kernel. We also bought a baler for hay and straw. I wish my farming friends could see it; it is a Kubota, and cranks out these wee bales. Not like those big bales of the days of yore, or the absolute monsters they have in Wisconsin these days.

Now that the rice is harvested, and we are plowing up paddies to grow vegetables, the days are shorter and the nights colder. The cold season is settling over northeast Thailand. As we approach Christmas season, all of us, children, staff and priests join together in prayerful thanks that we survived another year. The children are adequately fed and watered; there is enough rice for another year in the granaries; and our fish, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, pigs and cows are all contributing to the good health of the kids. Young men and women are in vocational schools, colleges and Universities, thanks to all our sponsors and friends who make Sarnelli House what it is: a beacon of hope and love for all the orphaned, mistreated and abandoned children who come here.

We pray for all of you who show such concern and interest in these children. May the Infant Jesus, His Mother and St. Joseph bless you all, with good health, happiness and peace in the Year of the Horse. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

*Frs. Mike and Ole, Brother Keng, Kate and all the staff and the children of Sarnelli House*