

Sarnelli House

NEWSLETTER

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A BLESSED AND MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL FROM US ALL!!

It feels like I just wrote last year's greetings a few weeks ago! As I stagger along into my eighties, events are kind of a blur. But all of us at Sarnelli House want to wish you a very blessed and happy Christmas season, and the best that the Lord can offer in the New Year!

To be blunt, the year of 2019 kind of sucked for Sarnelli House. Our wonderful Housemother, Grandma Wan died in late September and one of our nicest and sacrificing housemothers who works at the House of Hope, told me in early November that she has cancer in the duct between the liver and the gall bladder. The cancer has moved to her lymph glands in her neck. She is the favorite of the children, and her quiet acceptance of her plight had me to tears, when she asked to continue working. She said that being with the babies would keep her mind off her illness, and if she had to be home, she would be alone. I agreed she should work and do what she could. We told her if she got tired, just go upstairs and rest. We are praying that the doctors can conquer the cancer, but she is resigned and just wants to live life as normally as she can. 2019 also saw the passing of some benefactors who have been such a support to the children.

Because of drought, we lost about 80% of our rice crop we planted in June and July. We were

blessed with a dear benefactor who came through with a donation so we can begin purchasing rice from areas that received sufficient rain. Usually, this area of the northeast and Laos gets enough rain, but this year we never had a monsoon season, just isolated rain showers. I had the boys cut and bale the straw for the cattle, but have to do something with the weed clogged fields. I don't want to spray, since the spray here poisons the ground water and is very harmful to the health of anyone doing the spraying.



One bright spot in our bucolic ventures is the fact that Miss Peh, who retired two years ago and has a huge successful garden, offered to plant a big vegetable garden on the 12 rai piece of land where we have a orchard and my house, plus two other houses; one for two of our boys and another for a family. The mother in that family is a lady who was in fourth grade when she and two other girls were stoned while trying to go to school. It was known that they had AIDS, and the governor of that province asked me to take them and raise them at Sarnelli. Her husband and little boy do not have AIDS. So, Peh has plenty of help with her garden. We will not have to buy vegetables in the market, and we have bananas, mangos, and papayas for fruit.

2019 was the year for babies. Suddenly, a herd of tiny little creatures were given us, and some of our girls who had left us cam back pregnant. As they gave birth, they took care of their babies before leaving the baby with us and continued seeking their fame and fortune. With 19 of these runts running through Pampers and milk, we keep Macro superstore quite solvent. All told, we have about 160 children, depending on who is counting.

Kate, our Australian nurse and Brother Keng go weekly on their Outreach trek, visiting and helping poor families; especially those with AIDS. We send their children, those with AIDS, and those without, on to school. Many of these children have done well. We also help old, abandoned people in surrounding villages, together with the Vincent de Paul groups in the villages. And we have a large group of women who are poor and have no milk for their babies coming for milk for the babies and sometimes even Pampers. Kate's Irish husband, Brian O'Riordan is our fund raiser, English teacher and together with Brother Keng, helps kids chose their schools, and moderates their progress. Father Ole has taken over many of my old jobs and has great success. He got us organized and we are now a Thai Foundation. Fr. Ole also is the treasurer for the Redemptorists in Thailand. He has to split his time between Sarnelli and the financial office in Bangkok.

Lastly, the children are doing fine. Some of our kids who left us did not take their ARV medicine to fight off their AIDS virus, and came back quite sick. Kate took them to doctors at the University Hospital in Khonkaen, where the doctors monitor their progress back to health. We bawl the kids out for not taking their medicine, since they can easily pass on the virus to others. Many of our kids studying away are getting very good grades, and they are all being monitored by Brother Keng, Brian and Mrs. Dtim.

As for me, I am well taken care of. I still get to our gym to exercise, although nothing heavy like I used to lift. I can't seem to cross a road, without a kid from one of the houses grabbing me by the arm to safely convey me to the other side. I don't drive much anymore. A little three year old girl I took in over 20 years ago, is a big girl, finished college in phys-ed, and now is my driver. She weighs more than I do, and brags about being my bodyguard. They all make my old age pleasant and most of the time funny and interesting. And for this I thank the Lord for giving us these children, and allowing us to bring love and hope in their lives. And that is MY Christmas gift. On Christmas, we will offer Mass and pray for you all; good health, happiness and peace.

Father Mike , Fr. Ole, Brother Keng, Brian, Kate and all the staff and children

