



MERRY CHRISTMAS, FOLKS!

What with Christmas and the New Year looming, we are happy to see Covid slowly fading in the rear view mirror. All of our staff and children older than 12, except for me, are vaccinated (Me unvaxxed for Sarnelli House; Aaron Rodgers for the Packers). But I vowed not to make the Christmas letter an extended whine about Covid, and I plan to be vaccinated before the end of the year. Unlike others, we have been blessed with no cases with the kids or staff. But the last 20 months were hard on the kids. The boys seemed to accept the lack of entertainment like the Water Park, movies, going to the mall, etc. The girls, not so much. Some of them were sneaking out at night, so we extended the walls. I gave the ladies a bamboo pole and told them to learn how to pole vault. The roadrunners eventually left with boyfriends, and everyone settled down.

We did have one incident that is funny, now. For a while, up in the Northeast, there was much fanfare about kits to check for signs of Covid. Some of the grade school girls learned that one result of Covid is that the infected person loses the sense of smell. So, a herd of them would sidle up to a person and sweetly ask them if they wanted a free Covid test. If that person was as dumb as I was and agreed, they would promptly release a cloud of noxious intestinal gas, and run for their lives. They were lucky that I was old and crippled!



One big problem arose when over 20 of the older kids were fired from their jobs, and asked to come back to Sarnelli, since they had no jobs, and no money for food and board. There was no work for them up here, so we had the boys work on the farm and gardens, etc. The girls work with our 23 babies, and help at other houses with cooking and laundry. Some very generous donors help us with a small salary for each of the kids. We have lodging for them, and, of course food. None of them have been called back to their old jobs, so it will be a few months, I think, before people start hiring in earnest. So, we now have 153 kids, all told, at Sarnelli. They eat like wolves.

In March of this year, we had a storm that was like a tornado. It touched down near the village of Pai Si Tong and ripped through our three houses and then lifted to travel a mile to Sarnelli House and the adjacent cemetery and bring down trees on our buildings, tear up roofs and walls and monuments in the cemetery. It looked like God was punishing someone at Sarnelli. I was contemplating having folks cast lots to find out who the varmint was. (Casting lots worked in the Old Testament!). It took us months to clean up and make repairs.

This has been a bad year on the farm. North of us in China, and south of us, in the lower northeast and central plains, there has been bad flooding. In our area, we never had a real monsoon season. We planted late, and with barely enough water, found weeds choking the rice. Dogs got in our chicken coop, and killed almost all our chickens. The country had swine flu for a while, so we couldn't buy pigs to breed. We had 4 brood sows, but I guess they took the vow of chastity, because after two attempts at artificial insemination, they did not get pregnant. So, we sold all four sows, and used the money to buy small piglets, to raise and breed. Our gardens are doing well, so the kids have vegetable and fruit. We have plenty of fish in the ponds. I bought the boys some fishing rods, and they love fishing, since the fish are big, and it can be a struggle to land them.

We have had some sorrow, too. Four kids that were with us died. Choke died in a horrendous motorcycle accident, in January. In July, Liew died because he stopped taking his medicine to ward off AIDS, plus two girls, Joy and Eim. They were married, and like Liew, decided they didn't need the ARV medicine, which keeps people with HIV healthy.

So, we hope and pray that all of you stay safe and healthy, and that the troubles of 2021 will not be repeated in 2022. May the Infant Jesus and His Mother bless you and give you happiness and peace at Christmas and throughout the New Year. We will be praying Christmas Eve Mass for you and yours!

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

