

Articles on the 2012 Theme Dominican Women and Preaching

Introduction

Federation of Vietnamese Dominican Sisters was organized since 1996. As Dominican women committed to serving the Word of God, to preaching the Good News to the poor, we are united in one Dominican charism and mission.

The Federation of Vietnamese Dominican Sisters includes 7 Dominican Sisters Congregations in Viet Nam: Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine Siena of Bui Chu, Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine Siena of Tam Hiep, Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine Siena of Thanh Tam, Dominican Sisters of St. Rose of Lima of Xuan Hiep, Dominican Sisters of The Rosary of Lang Son, Dominican Sisters of Our Lady, the Queen of Thai Binh, and the Holy Rosary Region of Dominican Sisters of Monteils. Currently, we have 1316 perpetually professed sisters, 667 temporally professed sisters, 153 novices, 96 Pre-novices, and 753 postulants.



We together revised our constitution and had the same habit. We have also experienced of collaboration in formation and mission. Since 1996, we established the Institute of Theology, named “Inter-Congregational Dominican Institute of St. Thomas Aquinas” in order to respond to the need of theological, religious, pastoral and catechetical formation of the Junior Sisters to prepare for their Dominican life and preaching and grow as authentic and mature religious. In awareness of the Church’s communion and the renewed contribution from the consecrated women for the future of the new evangelization of the church in this fast changing society, the Institute is also open to welcome members of other Congregations, Secular Institutes, and Societies of Apostolic Life throughout Viet Nam. The number of students has been increasing from 95 students at the beginning to over 350 students at this school year 2012.



Sharing the Vietnamese Church’s mission of building up God’s Kingdom in the country, we exercise our Dominican preaching through the fields of evangelization, pastoral ministries, education, and through actions for justice and love for the poor and the marginalized by the work of charity in different ways. Here are some typical stories.

- Preaching Word through Caring for Neglected Elderly Women
- Education and Care for Handicapped Children
- Listening to the Cry of Fetus
- Good News for Street Children
- Mission for the minority people in Lang Son
- Youth Education Ministry

Sr. Therese Tuyet Pham, OP
President of Federation of Vietnamese Dominican Sisters

Preaching Word through Caring for Neglected Elderly Women

Preaching is the center of Dominican life and also our identity. Through baptism and the call to be members the Order of Preachers, we, Dominican Sisters of Tam Hiep, Vietnam, are entrusted to preach the Word of God to the world at wherever we are and by whatever we do, like liturgical preaching, teaching, communicating, writing, ..., but even more profound way is to be witnesses for Christ by our lives. In this sense, we have chosen 2012 as the Year of *Dominican Women and Preaching* with an effort is to preach the Word of God through caring for neglected elderly women at Suoi Tien Shelter.

Suoi Tien (Fairy Stream) Shelter, a sweet home for neglected elderly women, is located at 528 Suoi Tien, Cay Gao, Trang Bom District, Dong Nai Province, thirty miles northeast of Ho Chi Minh City. It is rested on a seven and a half acre property, and run by Dominican Sisters of Tam Hiep, Vietnam.

Suoi Tien Shelter was established since 1993, originally by Sister Catherine Toan Le, OP, from her very significant and personal experience. There was a time when Sr. Catherine was on the way to visit people in a poor far-flung village in the forest, she entered a ruined shack and found a paralyzed lonely woman lying sick on a bamboo bed. Her name is An. Ms An lived depending on the charity of her neighbors.

Being touched by her living condition, Sr. Catherine brought that woman home, a small cottage in a rural area, to take care of her. This news was spread out quickly to many people, and thus some abandoned and neglected elderly women started to come to Sr. Catherine for help. They had come and stayed with her, and thus her house became Suoi Tien Shelter for needy women. Sr. Catherine did not only provide basic needs for those women, such as clothes, food and shelter, but she also cared for their spiritual needs like helping them at their deathbed, to make sure that they have a peaceful dying.

On January 20, 2006, Sr. Catherine passed away by a heart attack, Sr. Isabelle Huong Tran, OP was asked to be a director of the shelter. Until that time, Suoi Tien Shelter had been a home for sixteen elderly women and helped to burry for forty-two elderly women. Since then, the number of new members has grown dramatically.

As a director of the shelter, Sr. Isabelle has devoted all her time and energy to care for those vulnerable residents as they are parts of the body of Christ. With a new vision for the shelter, plus a great love for the poor, Sr. Isabelle bought some more land to expand the shelter in order to help more women. She created a lovely, peaceful and fresh-green environment around the shelter. In addition, she also renovated the shelter by dividing it into three separate sections: Section A with fifty beds is for those who are still able to take care of themselves. Those residents who can cook for themselves, the sisters do the shopping for them from a market nearby. Section B with twenty-five beds looks like an assisted living, and this is for those who are paralyzed, or have some mental illness, those who cannot do much thing for themselves. Section C with fifteen beds is an infirmary for those who are most needed. The shelter is also equipped with medical conditions providing healthcare for all residents.

Initially, Suoi Tien Shelter ran based on donations from benefactors and nonprofit organizations. However, living on such dependent situation, it could be unstable and very destitute to the lives of those residents. Being moved deeply by Jesus' word: "*You give them something to eat*" (Matthew 14:16), Sr. Isabelle and three other sisters thought of some projects, to create not only a fresh and pleasant environment around the shelter, but also to have some income for the shelter. Finally, they came up with a brilliant idea that to create a fish "farm" right



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on the land of the shelter. They dug four ponds (about 2 acres) around the shelter to raise fish for two purposes: first, it was to supply food for the shelter, and second, it was a source of income for the shelter by selling fish. Besides raising fish, the sisters also raised pigs and chickens with the same purposes. The sisters also created a greenhouse around the shelter to provide some vegetables and fruits for the residents.

Sr. Isabelle and sisters are working tirelessly to assist people, particularly women with disabilities, abandoned, lost, and elderly coming from all parts of the country. Each day, the sisters have helped cleaning rooms, washing clothes, providing healthcare, feeding, bathing, and praying with and for the residents. If someone passes away, the sisters also arrange for her last rites and funeral.



Currently, there are sixty-two residents at the shelter. Among those, twenty-five are partially paralyzed, seven have mental illness, and three are blind. Many of those elderly were not Catholics when they just came to the shelter. However, after living for a while and by witnessing the love and self-giving lives of the sisters, they decided to become Catholics.



Though they come from different backgrounds and parts of the country, those residents have lived like a community of sisterhood at the shelter. A self-giving and union of mind and heart lifestyle of those sisters has created a cheerful and peaceful community at the shelter. They have a prayer life. Each day, they get up at 4:30 for a morning prayer and end their days by an evening prayer. They pray four times daily, and all are united in Christ. Suoi Tien Shelter has been a good soil for evangelization in the midst of Buddhists and other faith and religious traditions.

Although Suoi Tien Shelter had existed since in 1993, it was just received permission from the local government to become an official shelter for 100 residents. This reluctant concession from the local government is because an awkward feeling that the government has not provided any care for the needy, while Catholic women religious have been way advanced in this ministry.

Inspired by the word of God “You are my witnesses” (Acts 1:8) from our 13th General Chapter on June 2011, we decided to go back to our original charism by being witnesses for Christ’s love in wherever we are and serve. Hoping that when serving elderly residents as parts of the body of Christ at Suoi Tien Shelter, we also bring God’s love to them and witness that, in God everyone is respected with their dignity as a human being; each person is a child of God, regardless of rich or poor, healthy or illness. No one is abandoned, or neglected in God’s family.

Sr. Maria Ha Dinh, OP
The Dominican Sisters of Tam Hiep, Vietnam

Handicapped Children Center of St. Martin

Background of Handicapped Children Center

In principle, food to eat, house to live, study in school and having concrete condition to develop oneself are the basic need to children. But these need seen be lacked to the Handicapped children in Trang Bom district. Trang Bom District is located in the north of Dong Nai province which belongs to the part of the South-east in Viet Nam. Living in this district we witnessed so many handicapped children. The handicapped children seem being lonely and unhappy. The economic status of the families has strong impact to look after the handicapped children inside families. In daily day, the parents work hard in the field, or have to work outside, their handicapped children have to lonely stay at homes in the little huts.

During Christmas season in 1997, as the Dominican Sisters community has apostolate in Hung Long Parish, we decided to organize a special day to serve the handicapped children not only for Hung Long Parish but all handicapped people in Trang Bom district including. By this activity, the disability people have chance to be carried out from the little hut and to meet the other. In their special day, they can be sympathy with the other handicapped children, watch some of performing art. The disability children really enjoyed and gained the happiness... The event was very successful and sisters could see the happiness from these miserable children... This special day was the first step which lead Dominican community in Hung Long Parish followed up the idea to have special educate to handicapped children in Trang Bom district.



Until 2003 Sisters could do something special activities to help the handicapped children. So the children have chance to play together, to do some activities together and to learn how to read, write and speak as other children in same village. Sister Catherine Tran Thi Tri and two primary school teachers were in charged of teaching 18 handicapped children. During that time the parents were asked to bring their children to the class and pick them up in the late afternoon.



2003 – 2007: the numbers had increased from 18 to 45 which included 34 handicapped and 11 deaf children. Most of children who learned for last few years now are be able to read, to write and do some simple mathematics.

Understanding that handicapped children need to teach by special way, the Dominican Sisters of Thanh Tam had sent 7 Sisters to study in the Pedagogy University and main in the Special Education Department. The educational process took 4 years to graduate with BA degree. Hopefully the children with special needs will be benefit from their teachers' expertise.

At the beginning, the class room was built with cheap and second-hand materials. They were just good enough to set up simple class (iron roof with brick wall and 1 door and 1 window), the room did not have adequate light and facilities for them.

Since 2009, a center was built to give these children a good and large school facilities and classrooms. In this year, there are around 70 children (deaf and dumb, down syndrome, mental problem and disability of activity) who study in our Handicapped center of St. Martin. The children are educated in kind of their disability status. Sr. Matta Bui Thi Thanh Thuy, Director of the center, together with 3 other sisters and 4 teachers teach the children. The sisters build the educational program with the aim to fit with each child in their special need. We try to teach the children can *read, write, speak and simple mathematics*. Furthermore, the special children have chance *playing, service themselves*, having *social contact*, develop their *practice skills* in difference aspects etc...



May god bless our work as instruments and witnessing of God love to handicapped children and respect their dignity as God's children.

Sr. Emmanuel Hong Yen, OP
The Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, Thanh Tam

Listening to the Cry of Fetus



Right to live, right to be respected, freedom etc... is the values which is highlight in the social life these days. Human living is attracted one who spends all his/her life to save and protect another from threatening of alive. In contrary, day by day in the hospital, health care central in Vietnam, the thousands of fetus are took away from her mother, the right to live of baby is deprived. Abortion is the existent behavior within young Vietnamese these days. In the law aspect, Vietnamese parents are ones who have right to accept or deny their fetus' alive. Abortion, family planning by alternative methods is the legal actions under the law in Vietnam.

Abortion rates in Vietnam are among the highest in the world. According to studies published in 1999, Vietnam had the highest abortion rate in the world with 83 abortions

per 1,000 women aged 15-44. This number represents public-sector abortions only. Babies are aborted throughout every trimester, babies are aborted at any month during development of fetus, even in the last period – between 7 to 9 in development of fetus.

Listening to the cry of fetus, Dominican Sisters attempt to detour women from having abortions by offering a warm and open home for them to live until two or three months after they give birth. Since the date of 03 November 2006, an “open home” for unwanted pregnant girls was established by Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine Siena of Thanh Tam in Xuan Loc Diocese. The “open home” is called *Emmanuel House*.

The base principles and the goals of Emmanuel house

The Emmanuel house was foundation with *the aim at to protect young girls' pregnant and hinder one's abort*. We support the young single mothers in order they can escape from the risk of abortion. Furthermore, the young single mothers are able to receive the available condition which they can live under the pregnant and child birth period. They spend their pregnant and child birth periods in our Emmanuel house without fees. It means we support food, clothes, medical care, hospital fees, etc... to the unhappy young mothers in free. Furthermore, our sisters in Emmanuel House try to create a good condition in order the unfortunate young mothers are able to live with safe and peaceful. The sisters in Emmanuel house try to go along with the unhappy abandon girls and give them spiritual loving care, playing the role as a counselor, understanding and support them to overcome their crisis. Our Emmanuel house is opened to any abandon single mothers. Respecting individual person, equal behavior does not concern to religious fact, education level, social status, family background ect.... *Equality, respect and sympathy are the base principles of the Emmanuel house*.

The single mothers live in deny from their family and criticizing in community. That is reasons which leads the young single mothers are shock, lose believe in the other people. The surrounding life seems be closed to the young single mothers, they live in defense themselves and escape the existent social life. So *sharing the daily life, building the relation in kindness, having sympathy to each other, accepting the existent context of life are the training process* which we would like to lead the young single mothers – the members in our Emmanuel house. We believe these values can be dynamic to push they come over their extremely hard step of life.

After about 6 years (Nov - 2006 to June - 2012), the Emmanuel house have received almost two hundred and fifty abandon pregnant girls. Although the unfortunate young mothers live in Emmanuel house in short period of their life, but in hopefully we believe that the experience of living in Emmanuel house can be a point of step, so the young single mothers can reflect oneself and find down the new values in their life. Maybe from the falling experience, they are able to live in sense of responsibility with themselves lead to decide and have good choice in their life on the time coming.

Sr. Emmanuel Hong Yen, OP
The Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, Thanh Tam

GOOD NEWS ON WAYS

As a Dominican sister, I have a mission to proclaim the Truth and the Love of God. However, I always wonder that “How can I do this task in the society which is full of social problems?” So everyday I listen to God who accompanies me in my job as a social worker. At present, I am an executive Director of Friends for Street Children Association (FFSC). FFSC delivers its services to about 1500 children and their families through 7 centers.

Ho Chi Minh City is an industrial city of Vietnam, with a population of more than 8 million. Attracted by the rapid economic expansion of Ho Chi Minh City, a large number of immigrants from many parts of the country are coming. However, they mostly are poor with low education, professional skills which lead to unstable jobs and low salaries. They live together with many other family’s members in a temporary houses or narrow rental rooms. They cannot earn enough for living. It becomes so difficult for these parents to manage school fees for their children, even they need some financial help from their children. Many children of these families have to support financially by selling lottery tickets, newspapers, shoes polishing, or begging,...

This following is some concrete examples of the impact of our programs on the life of the children:

First



I met one girl in the garbage dump. She has a small figure, sunburnt hair and skin. She walked around the dump to collect bottles and nylon bags. Coming from Western Region, her family lives in an old and small boat and earns their living by collecting things from the garbage dump. She happily told us that she can earn from 20,000 to 30,000 VND per day for doing this job.

Sixteen is the age of dreaming. But her only dream does not come true even though it is just simply going to school. I suggested her to have a free of charge class at night but it seems that the burden of earning for living gave her no chance to do it.



Second



At Binh Dien wholesale market in district 8, everybody calls them “da ca lan dua” because their jobs are to take fruits and fishes falling down from trucks. They are brought to the market at sunset and wait for the coming of the trucks. They carry nylon bags, hiding behind the trucks and taking fruits or fishes dropping down from baskets.

At night when the porters get tired due to carrying a lot of goods, the children take advantage to get fruits and fishes in the baskets. One of them goes around to make goods falling down, others get them and run away. They gather together at another place to share their “spoil” and move to another truck to continue doing their “jobs”. They “work” up to 5:00 o’clock and “earn” from 20,000 to 30,000 VND. If they are caught by the security guards they will be kept in the police station to the next day. “Working” at night and sleeping at day, they could not remember the time for school and could not study even when they tried to go to school.



Third

Without going out at night like others, one of them tries to earn her living from selling lottery tickets. Her parents divorced and go away so she lives with her aunt. After attending the free of charge class, she goes to the nearby ferry or the bistros along the streets to sell lottery tickets. When the bistros have no customers, she leans against the wall and takes a nap. When customers come, she continues crying: “Please help me buy a lottery ticket!” She moves from one table to another up to 10 o’clock. Her income depends on the tickets she sells. If she sells all the tickets she gets, she will earn 60,000 VND. If the tickets sometimes remain, they will take away all her income.



Meeting these children and knowing their situations often take away my strength and enthusiasm in doing my job because I could not find the ways to help them overcome their problems. But the Word of God encourages me and gives me strength when it says that “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40). And I believe that in the Lord my effort will not be in vain (cf. 1Cr 15:58). I may not solve any of their problems but sharing with their burden in life and giving them a chance to change their lives, I am trying to bring the Good News into the world, to make the love of God present in every street that I pass by, especially in every heart that I try to touch because I believe that Jesus comes for mankind having life and having it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10).

Sister Mary Thao Le, OP
Vietnamese Dominican Sisters of Saint Rose of Lima

MISSION IN LANG-SON DIOCESE

The Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary, Lang Son was established in 1918 in the Lang Son Diocese. The first nuns collaborated with the Dominican priests, Lyon Province, to evangelize the ethnic minority people. They lived in different the mountainous border between China-Vietnam.

At the beginning, the nuns evangelized the people by means of society activity such as visiting, comforting the people, gratuitously distributing medicines, healing the sick... and baptizing the dying children. During the war, the nuns worked hard to feed the priests in prison or being kept under surveillance.

At the peaceful time, the nuns freely went to the people to announce the Word of God by teaching the catechumen, baptizing, doing the catechism at the elementary level because the nuns had to learn their language. Few people were baptized.

Nowadays, mission is prospering because the people are more cultivated. They live in villages forming parishes. Since there is still not priest, the nuns act in his role. Step by step, the diocese is re-established. The

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churches were built. Some parishes have priests. The nuns collaborate with the priests in different parishes to serve the local people. More people were baptized.

Concerning the apostolate work, the nuns are responsible for the choir, teach the catechism and take care of different organizations in the parishes.

Evangelizing by means of society activity begins expanding: visiting the sick and the poor; gratuitously distributing medicines; helping the leper, the handicaps, and the elderly; giving the people both material and spiritual assistance.

Especially, the nuns had a house built to take care of the orphans and handicaps. Its name is MÁI ẤM TÌNH THƯƠNG VINH SƠN - THE LOVING HOUSE OF SAINT VINCENT. It is located at 106 Hoang Van Thu Str. – Ward 2 – That Khe Smalltown, Trang Dinh Dist. – Lang Son Province. We are gratuitously taking care of 24 paralyzed girl children in this House and 30 paralytics at their houses. We give all of them food, medical care, and clothes.

The nuns also attach special importance to education: running loving classes (for free) because the government does not allow us to run a school; giving scholarship, stationery, school uniform, and bicycle (because they live 10 – 20 km away from school).

The mission at Lang Son Diocese, in the North of Vietnam, at the border between China-Vietnam, is developing but still limited. We need the prayers and material assistance of the Federation of the Dominican Superiors and all the Dominican Sisters on over the world.

Thank you very much.



Sisters are sharing the Word of God for the catechumens in Bảo Lâm village, Lang Son diocese



Sister Agnes Hằng is caring Miss Sáu – a patient of catechumens in Lũng Thuông village, Bó Tờ parish.

Sr. Therese Minh Do, OP
The Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary, Lang Son

With the Youth Education Ministry

One of the major pastoral activities of the Congregation from the beginning is "education in faith and culture to the youth. However, due to the circumstances of the time, this activity of the congregation gradually declined, instead of it are the other parish activities, being in charge of groups such as: Dominican laity fraternities, and especially the choirs ..." However, from 2000 onwards, the Congregation has decided to return to the source with primary apostolate is "education in faith and culture to young people", in which catechism is most important and be appreciated. Objects who sisters serve here are all of people, especially those are children and the youth in the rural areas of the countryside.

Here are some activities that the sisters have been trying to do:

* Teaching catechism for all ages: children, youth, catechumens doctrine, the doctrine of marriage.

* Promoting the Bible teaching and activities to the youth in parishes of the Dioceses; today, most of the youth are student ages. The biggest risk is that they do not have a solid foundation of doctrine, it is easy to make them vacillate in the life of faith in the environment of universities with many different philosophies. Therefore, we have attempted to promote the teaching of the Bible and strengthen faith for them through activities periodically in local parishes.

* Creating jobs for the youth, special for young women in rural areas; many young women without condition to continue with their study to enter the colleges and universities, even that of high school, thus, most of them does not have any occupations in their hand. To make a living, they have to leave their home town for the big cities to find a job to earn money for their life. They have to do any job that they could find, such as: working in the factories, bar staff, or being Osin for the rich and purchasing the scrap. Those jobs seem to lead to many dangers threatening the moral life as well as the catholic faith of the youth.



Facing this situation, we are awake of being able to train and help them to get jobs right at their home land. With the limitations of the congregation, we established a sewing machines and embroidering garment factory in Phu Nhai Convent helping young people to get the appropriate work in a healthy environment.

* Inviting young people participate in social and charitable work, especially to participate in activities to pro-life, to help them more aware of the value of life. And we built a charitable house in Trung Lao convent, named St. Paul Charity House, running by the sisters of the convent, to

supply accommodations to unwanted pregnant women (mostly students and workers), help them to retain their foetus for giving birth, against abortion, simultaneously help them coming back to their daily lives.

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Difficulties: With what have been done, we still face many difficulties in this apostolic activity. On the one hand, due to the limited professional skills, because of lacking of condition, so most sisters are not trained deeply about skills in catechizing as well as skills in youth ministry. The abilities of sisters are limited, while young people's standard of knowledge is higher and higher nowadays.

Orientation: To meet the demand in accordance with the times, the Council has set out guidelines in the coming years will try to create conditions to help sisters polishing up their knowledge and strengthen pastoral teachings as well as youth ministry. Also, to be able to reach the youth, the sisters need "meeting them at their own place" meaning that we should meet them at their own circumstances, to listen , to share, to sympathize with them and to recognize their own needs.

Hopefully, the coming years, the congregation can approach closer to the circumstances of young people and especially the students, the workers ... in order to help them to live the passion of the soul.



The Dominican Sisters of Bui Chu Diocese