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ìLet the Little Children Come to MeÖî

Maureen Fiedler | May. 24, 2010 NCR Today

Vietnam: Day Two

Today, our interfaith delegation from the United States visited the /Center for Children with Disabilities/ in Cu Chi, Vietnam. It is run by a Catholic priest, Father Phan Khac Tu and a wonderful staff.

As we walked into a large room on the ground floor, we were greeted by a couple dozen children sitting on the floor, singing and chanting and welcoming our strange looking group. These children suffer from a wide variety of disabilities, but they were able to be hugged, and to appreciate Bob Edgar?s crazy/wonderful magic tricks.

Upstairs, we visited more severely disabled children, lying on mats. Most had badly crippled limbs, and some had enlarged skulls. One girl, eleven years old, had the body of a two-year-old. Still, they smiled, reached out, and seemed to welcome our visit, and our hugs.

These are just a small fraction of the children with birth defects that are believed to be caused by Agent Orange/dioxin, the poisonous herbicide the United States sprayed over the countryside for ten years during the Vietnam conflict.

They are cared for at this Center because their parents cannot give them the kind of round-the-clock attention most of them need. But this Center, and another run by Fr. Tu, hold only about 130 children; he is just now breaking ground for yet another center which will hold 200. And this barely scratches the surface of the needs of such children in just this area of Vietnam.

It takes a special kind of love to care for such children. They will not grow like normal children, go to school or become adults and raise families. Some will die in the early years of life. Others will simply live on in a world where pain and discomfort are moment-to-moment realities. Yet the care here calls up in me the words of Jesus, ?let the little children come to me?? The witness of Fr. Tu and his staff is stunning.

But these children cry out to us in their suffering to stop the horrors of war. For wars do not end when the last troops are gone or the last gun is stilled. It?s something to ponder when we see pictures of Iraqi children or Afghan children today.

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