



Fr. Ray Foundation Newsletter

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Message from Fr. Larry

This year I am celebrating my 50th anniversary of being a Redemptorist. 43 of those years I have served in Thailand. August and September have been busy months as we opened 2 new projects. You will read about them in the stories that follow. Thank you for your support!

Fr. Ray Children's Village

After several months of land clearing and building work, the Fr. Ray Children's Village accepted its first residents on September 6th. The twenty-five children



who have been chosen to live in the first 4 new houses had been staying at the Fr. Ray Children's Home and the Fr. Ray Drop-In Center for Street Kids, but now they will live in the houses with their new "brothers and sisters" and have a "Mother" to take care of them and give them the family life that all children deserve. You can see in the photo one of the mothers with her 6 children. Incidentally, the little boy in the front with the big smile is the same Mr. Condo who looked so sad in the last newsletter. Recently, we accepted a little 4 year old girl. Later on the same day, her HIV infected mother died knowing that her child will be safe with us. Her father is 41 and makes a living by collecting scrap metal and plastic for reselling.



Mr. Condo

Fr. Ray Day Care Center

Pattaya is noted for its 5 star hotels and fancy seaside resorts. A little known fact is the 27 slums areas hidden from sight. I accompanied our team to several local slum areas and we were appalled by what we saw. How anyone can live, much less raise a family, in such conditions is frightening; no clean running water, no proper sanitary conditions, borrowed electricity and ponds of dirty stagnant water, a natural breeding ground for fever bearing mosquitoes.



Worst of all was the sight of small children living in such miserable conditions, their parent or parents away at work. You can only imagine the risk they face from disease, harm and abuse. We decided to do something for the poorest of these children. On September 11th, the Fr. Ray Day Care Center opened its doors. Seventy young children ages 2 to 5 have been selected from the poorest of the poor families living in these slum areas around Pattaya. We hope to prevent them becoming future street children by preparing them for school.





Sports day

One of the biggest events of the sporting calendar at the Vocational School for the Disabled is the annual Mahathai Games. Held over three days all students are expected to participate in at least one sport, and no one can say that they can not take part because of their disability as all the students have a disability. Sports range from wheelchair basketball and tennis to fencing and swimming and athletics to shot, discus and javelin. All students and staff were divided into four teams and the first day started with a parade of teams who all marched onto the sports court and listened to speeches to mark the opening of the games. Red, blue, yellow and green flags were raised to represent the four teams and then one of the athletes arrived with the flame to officially open the Games.



Because of the different disabilities there are many categories in each sport, so a student with one leg missing will only compete with others with a similar disability as it would be unfair for a one legged student to run alongside someone who is missing an arm. For many students this was the first time that they have ever competed at a sport, and there were many nervous faces at the start line, but with each student having a team of supporters behind them and cheering them on, even the person who comes in last has achieved a personal best.

Fr. Ray School for Blind Children



Everyday tasks that we take for granted usually take the blind children a lot longer to learn. As small children we learn these everyday jobs and as we get older we can usually do them with our eyes closed, but our blind students have to learn these tasks without the ability to see. I watched recently as one class was learning to tie their shoe laces, and for a whole hour they sat and patiently tied and untied their laces many, many times.



Fr. Ray Drop-In Center



It's a busy time at our smallest project, the Drop-In Center with several new children arriving each week. We never know when new children will arrive, how old they will be, what problems they may have or what

the future holds for them. Some young people arrive in need of somewhere safe to stay, they arrive in Pattaya thinking they are going to have a better life but for most they soon realise that not all is good in Pattaya. One young boy, Tone arrived with a very sad story. Both his parents died of AIDS and his grandfather, unable to care for his young grandson placed him in a local detention center. Unable to take the brutality, fourteen year old Tone decided to run away. The first time he ran away he was soon picked up and returned to the detention center. The second time he decided to run away, he left with some friends, jumped the high wall of the detention center and slept in the jungle before making their way to Pattaya. Unable to find work they begged for money to buy food, but after receiving money from some good hearted citizens they were robbed at knifepoint and left with nothing. They then met a young street kid who told them about our Drop-In Center and they arrived dirty and hungry, but relieved to be off the streets and somewhere safe. Tone is one of the happiest young men you could ever wish to meet. He enjoys living at the Drop-In Center, loves the staff and volunteers that visit and enjoys a game of football at the end of each day. At the end of July, a mother brought her 3 boys to our Center. She left her husband who was drinking and physically abusing her and her children to come to Pattaya. The only work she could find was in a Bar as an attendant. The boys have been with us for 2 months and are doing very well. They want to continue



their education and to that effect, they have been moved to the Fr. Ray Children's Home. The 3 boys in the photo are: Jo who is 14, Joker who is 12 and Taxi who is 4. We will ask Jo why he has such an ordinary nickname.

Moving the Drop-in Center



A generous benefactor gave us the use of a piece of land since 1986. At first, Fr. Ray used the site to establish the School for Blind Children. In 1992, it became the Fr. Ray Children's Home. In 2004, we opened the Fr. Ray Drop-In Center for Street Kids, a 24/7 refuge for kids in trouble. However, the owner is going to sell the land, therefore we have to move this very important Project. We are in the process of building a new Drop-in Center. The new location is just as convenient for street children to find and seek refuge. The Drop-in Center is so important to our mission to help children on the streets and at great risk that it is receiving our full attention. Please help us to build and furnish a new Center. It won't be luxurious, but it will be a place where the children will be safe and we can care for them as we help them sort out their lives.

Fr. Ray Children's Home

The two computer rooms at the Children's Home have been up and running for over a year now and they are as busy as ever. Each day after the children come home from school, there is a rush up the stairs to get a seat at one of the computers. Both the boys and the girls have their own computer rooms and they are used mainly to do homework, though if no one is waiting to do homework or research then the children are allowed fifteen minutes to play whatever games they wish. Computer game addiction is a problem throughout Thailand, so by giving each child a chance to play their favorite games, they are then less likely to want to spend their days in computer game shops.



A Success Story

We have a young boy at the Children's Home who has lived under our care since 2005 and who has an extremely rare skin condition which, we are told, only affects one in a million people. When Don arrived at the Home at the age of seven, he was in a terrible state. His skin was peeling off, he had a very bad smell and the other children would not play with him as



they were scared of getting near him. Local doctors were unable to help him, but they did refer him to a specialist dermatologist in Bangkok and with the advice of this doctor and the loving care of our resident nurse, Don is looking and feeling better than he ever has. He is bathed twice a day using special antibacterial lotions. Now he is able to play with his friends and go to school each day. Last month he celebrated his birthday, and he became even more popular when he returned home with a bag full of goodies.



Fr. Ray Day

August 16th was the fifth anniversary of Fr. Ray's death. It was a day for all his children, students and friends to get together and celebrate his life and work. It was a wonderful day when many former residents and students returned to Pattaya to be part of this event. The day started early with the disabled students offering alms to the monks from a local Buddhist temple. The nine orange robed monks received the alms from the many present and past students as well as all the teachers, workers and volunteers. Holy water was sprinkled over the heads of those attending and everyone received a special blessing. Stalls were set up by the different Projects under the care of the Fr. Ray Foundation, selling everything from donated clothes, crafts produced by the blind students, artificial flowers made by the mothers of the Fr. Ray Children's Village and the older residents from the Fr. Ray Drop-In Center for Street Kids displayed a wonderful range of decorated mirrors, some of which take many weeks to produce. At 3.30pm a procession left the Redemptorist Center and made its way along the highway to the cemetery where Fr. Ray is buried. As the music group from the Vocational School played 'Unsung Hero', the song specially written and dedicated to Fr. Ray, everyone laid flowers as they passed his grave.



Thank You

It was a nostalgic day when we recently said farewell to Khun Supornthum Mongkolsawadi; former student, teacher and Principal of the School for the Disabled. When the School opened its doors in 1984 just four students were enrolled. This number has increased to 250 this year. Mr Supornthum was the driving force which made the school what it is today. He now is Director of our Job Placement Agency for all People with Disabilities of Thailand, including the graduates from our Vocational School.

To read more news, see more pictures and watch video films please see our website:
www.fr-ray.org



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