

Infant Jesus Sisters, Singapore (founded in France, 1662, established in Singapore 1854)



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330. Tel: 67602461 website: www.chij-sisters.org

OUR MISSION IN LAOS



Lao Children

Background to the Call to Laos

Through the Sisters in Thailand and the then Singapore Ambassador to Laos, Mr Dominic Goh, there were calls to respond to mission especially in the area of education and formation in Laos.

Laos is a landlocked country. The GDP is the lowest in this region which translates to abject poverty for the people especially those living in the remote villages.

The Seed is sown

At the IJ Asian Forum held in Bangkok in November 2016, after discussion and discernment, the Sister participants at the Forum affirmed the call and asked that a feasibility study be made to explore the response we can make to mission in Laos. As it is a collaborative effort of the Provinces of Asia, the Asian Mission Team (AMT) was formed with one representative each, either a religious sister or a Lay Partner, from Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, Myanmar and Singapore, under the leadership of Sr Woranuch, a Thai Sister.



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Last year 2022 marked the sixth anniversary of the Asian Mission Team. In the last two years the Lao borders were closed to us because of the Covid virus. This Lao Mission, to quote Sr Brigitte, is a gift that brings us together, this gift of God, when received by good hearts, multiplies, spreads and adjusts to cultures and times.

Our Visits

In 2017, the Team met and made 2 visits to Laos that year: In early 2017 the team made its first trip to Vientiane, capital of Laos. The Singapore ambassador to Laos, Mr Dominic Goh, introduced us to the Cardinal and the Minister of Education. At our invitation, the Minister of Education came to Singapore and visited St Nicholas Girls school. Another visit followed, this time by the full team in September.



Mr Dominic Goh, the then Minister of Education with Sr Maria



Sr Mary Therese Chua, Mr Goh, Cardinal Bo, Sr Maria and Mrs Shuquo Mathews

In April 2018, the Team visited the Bokeo area; an area close to the IJ Thai Community of Chiang Khong. Some background work – contacts and visits - had already been commenced by the Thai Sisters.

The members of the AMT crafted the following goals.

- To assist each child to receive an education
- To equip the students with proficiency in English for better job opportunities
- To build teacher capacity and upgrade their teaching skills
- To train teachers in teaching the English Language

This is in line with what we read in the book Better than Light “that the plight of young people preoccupied Fr Barre constantly. He remained convinced that the lack of human and religious education lay behind many of their sufferings”.

After the visit, the Team was keen to partner 3 schools – Namhodthai Primary School, Huayjod Primary School and Danthin Secondary School.

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When we visited [Namhodthai Primary School](#), there was no water supply, no electricity and no toilet facilities. There are 110 students and six staff members.



Future projects.

Some schools have only one toilet to serve the whole school community. Namhodtai Primary has no toilet. This will be an immediate project AMT will embark on.





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The next school is [Huayjod Primary School](#).



- Total number of classes: 5 (Primary 1 to 5)
- Total number of teachers: 6 (two males and four females).
- Total number of students: 120 (including some students from the kindergarten and nearby leper colony)
- Subjects taught: Mathematics, Environment studies, Physical education, Art and Handicraft
- School hours: 9am to 11am and 2pm to 4pm (students go home for lunch between 11am to 2pm)
- Students learn the English language from Primary 3 onwards
- The Principal requests for assistance with the teaching of the English language.
- Classrooms are generally bare, except for a blackboard. Nothing is left in the classrooms as they cannot be locked.
- The students share the textbooks that are provided by the government. These textbooks are handed down from class to class.
- The school is greatly in need of library books. There is currently no existing school library.
- The Laos government is promoting oral hygiene amongst students. The school has insufficient funds to build a trough required to teach the students how to practise good oral hygiene.

[Huayjod Primary School](#) is helmed by a proactive Principal and many projects can take off. This school has 100 primary school pupils and 20 kindergarten pupils.

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Danthin Secondary School



Our team with staff members and some students of Danthin Secondary School

Danthin Sec School has 34 teachers serving 470 students.

- Subjects taught: Lao, Mathematics, English, History, Social Studies, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physical Education and Art
- This Secondary school takes in graduating pupils from Huayjod Primary School and another Primary School.
- The teachers are keen in learning the English language.
- The school is in need of library books, a science laboratory and computers for the teachers to work more efficiently. These are almost non-existent at the moment.



In November 2018, a Mission Outreach was organised for 5 Singaporean Volunteers, 1 Interpreter and 2 Team members. During this visit, the Namhodthai Primary School was not included as the Team had been advised that another Group had adopted the School as their mission work.



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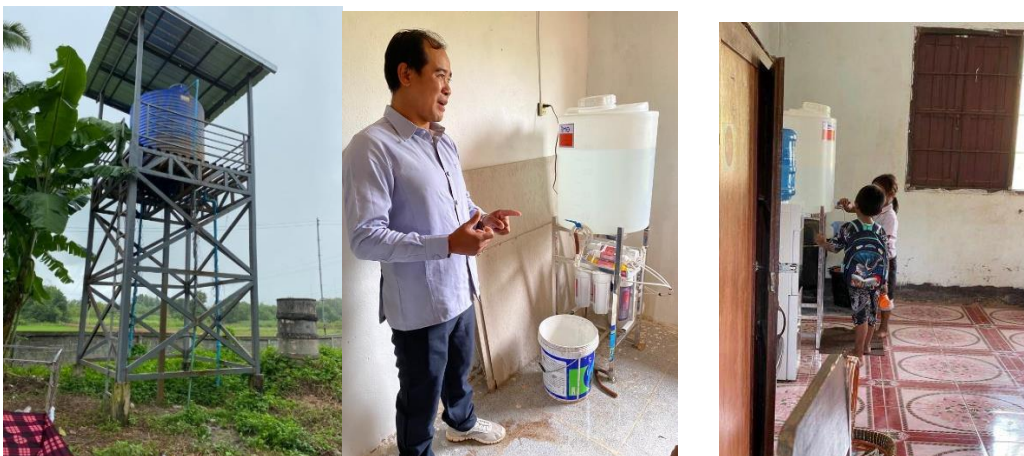
Another visit to Huayjod and Danthin was made in September 2019 to discuss in greater detail the areas of partnership and collaboration.

Snippets from the Mission Trip to Danthin Secondary and Huayjod Primary Schools, Bokeo, 26 to 29 November 2018.

1. **IT Workshop** - The teachers wanted to learn to use computers to research and develop better teaching resources for their classes and also to give the students hands-on practice in using computers. They also want to build a computer lab.
2. **Health Workshop** - The workshop focused on the infectious diseases and how to limit the spread through good hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing.
3. **Interaction with Students** – Team members played games and sang English and Laotian songs with students. Folding Paper planes excited the children
4. **Presentation of gifts** – English Text books to all students; Science equipment (magnets, microscopes, test tube stands, 2 laptops, compasses, tuning forks, thermometers)
5. We also presented the Principal of Huayjod Primary school with a **cash gift** to build a water trough to put into practice handwashing and tooth brushing habits.

Completed Projects

Water supply: Danthin Secondary has been purchasing its potable water from suppliers and aims to get their own clean water. We connected them to an Organisation in Cambodia that has not only brought clean drinking water to communities but is also involved in educating those communities on its sustainability. Two other schools have also requested for clean water.



The Clean Water Project is completed for all the **three schools**. Wells are dug and water is stored in **water tanks**. The school community now has clean water to drink and wash themselves. During the dry season the villagers nearby come to collect water. This has forged a closer relationship between the nearby villagers and the school.



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Water is filtered before drinking. Children are encouraged to bring a bottle of clean water home.

Another completed project is the **water trough** in Huayjod Primary. This is for pupils to brush their teeth and wash their hands. The Ministry of Education encourages all schools to install the water trough to improve hygiene. However, the school was not able to do so without financial assistance.



On going projects

More than a year ago Huayjod Primary has embarked on the Lunch Project (**Food and Nutrition Programme**).

The pupils bring a ball of glutinous rice for lunch. Some of them go without lunch. The lunch project provides each pupil an egg on two days of the week and some meat and noodles on a third day. This source of protein is much needed for growing children. The teachers reported that the children are more alert and look healthier.



Parents roster themselves to boil the eggs and cook lunch three days a week.

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A kitchen is being built in Huayjod Primary School. This is part of the Lunch project where staff and parents prepare lunch of boiled eggs and sometimes meat, twice a week, for the growing children.

The school projects see the parents helping to dig wells, paint the classrooms and cook lunch. They are more engaged in the school life.

The school has requested for a **library** for the pupils. The steel cupboard (as rats gnaw through wooden cupboards) in Huayjod Primary staff room serves as a central library of books in English and Lao. The baskets are used to bring the books to the classrooms - their mobile library.

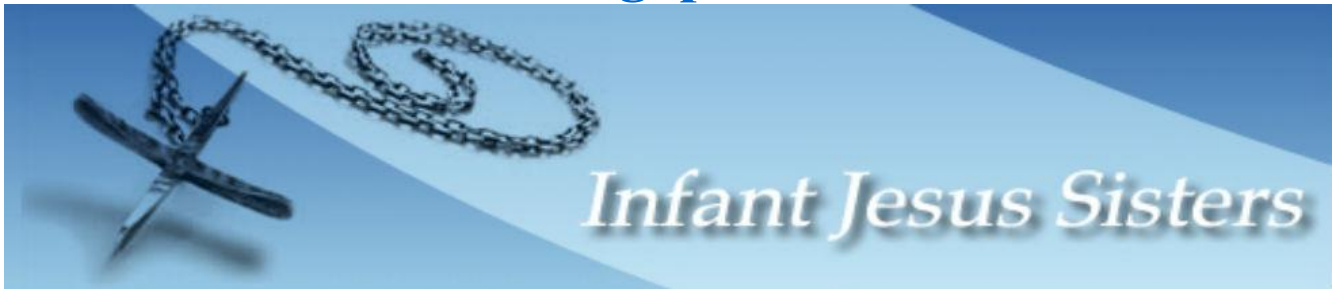
A nursery room was built for the kindergarten students aged 3-5.

The list of completed projects is not exhaustive. Others like stationery and school bags for all children and sports equipment for the pupils are needed.



Sr Wonaruch is our team leader.

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• The Principal and some teachers of Danthin Secondary school were keen on a two-day educational trip to Chiang Khong, Thailand to visit the IJ school there for **exposure**. This is part of the upgrading of the teachers' project. 29 Lao teachers went over to Chiang Khong for a 2day-1night educational trip, for staff capacity building.



Classroom Observation



Recreation



Laos teachers interested in agriculture



Carrying out what they have learnt



The vegetable garden

• **English Language Training for Teachers**. The proposal is for the English Language teachers to receive training during their school holidays.



A team of six from Singapore led by Mrs Mathews and Ms Swee visited Danthin Secondary School on 8 May 2023. They sat in an English lesson and conducted a sample lesson.

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"New teacher" trying her hand at group work

Some of these children may have to drop out from school to work at the casinos.

The Singapore team also visited Huayjod Primary School on 8 May 2023.

Fr Bounty is a local priest who works closely with the Pana school (higher up in the mountains, serves mainly tribal children) while ministering to about 1000 parishioners in the Bokeo region. The Lao Mission Team has expressed our wish to work with Fr Bounty.



Fr Bounty



Fr Bounty's parishioners with Shuquo and Gerry



Preparing to build the water trough

Though the Pana school has a natural source of water, the staff has requested for assistance to build a water trough for washing hands and brushing teeth. Work is in progress. The villagers are collecting wood to help in the project.

Pana Primary School is at the foot of the mountains. It serves mainly children from the tribal groups. Most children in Pana belong to the Lahu tribe. The tribal children are the most marginalised, have no IDs and thus have no access to health care and education. There are 120 pupils taught by 6 teachers.

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Children queuing to go to class



Children from the Lahu tribe at Pana School



New toilets for students and staff of Pana Primary School

Danthin Secondary school also has new toilets!

4 Singaporean friends joined Mrs Mathews and Ms Maria Swee to visit two schools up in the mountains on 7 May 2023. Though the weather was unmerciful and the roads were bumpy, the tribal children's welcome made up for their discomfort.



Roof not leaking now – another project



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The other school they visited was Yan Tai Primary School. The children are from the Lahu Tribe.



Positive outcomes as a consequence of our visits

The various visits by the Thai Sisters, Mission Team members and volunteers; the discussions with the Principals and teachers have seen some positive outcomes:

- Villagers and parents got together in April 2019 to paint Huayjod School.
- In May 2019, with the help of Principal Boon Nheaw and support of Fr Rangsiphon, the villagers helped to build the road up to the Church.
- Villagers donated the grilles for the windows in the teachers' room so that materials may be stored safely.
- The Asian Mission Team is ever grateful for the partnership of [Mr Damien Lam](#). He has been very generous in offering his advice and assistance with regard to policies and protocols in Laos.

With Mr Lam's extensive help, we could purchase text books for the students in Danthin Secondary School. He is also helping us to source for Laotian Children's Story books to add to the collection of English books that he helped to transport to Vientiane and onward to the schools.

We in the Lao Mission Team are reminded by Pope Francis "to show particular solidarity with the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. We are called to reach out to those who find themselves in the existential peripheries of our societies and to show particular solidarity with the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters: the poor, the disabled, the unborn and the sick, migrants and refugees, the elderly and the young who lack employment..."

Please continue to pray with and for us as we reach out to our brothers and sisters who need a helping hand!

Thank you and God bless!

Contact:

To communicate with the IJ Sisters about the Lao Mission Team, kindly email us at ijsisters.sg@gmail.com

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GENEROSITY BREEDS GENEROSITY

The Covid-19 pandemic may have its deadly effect but, in some situations, it has its creative power. Now that the pandemic has eased, we have embarked on a transformative journey to recovery.

The community spirit becomes alive during these difficult times. We still hear the people's cries of helplessness. We have tried to alleviate the pangs of hunger in those families who really need it most. It is heartening to note that in spite of the little they have, these families were willing to share with their neighbours who have less.

BIG CHALLENGE FOR ACADEMIC RECOVERY

Getting an education during this time is challenging enough. Our country has just resumed face to face classes. The first day of school, after a long lockdown, was a day of excitement, hope and possibilities. It is a long road to recovery to reclaim the loss of lessons.



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The cramped homes are hardly conducive to learning. The students are disadvantaged in having no access to the internet and computers to aid them in their home-based learning.

With easing pandemic restrictions, opening our IJ learning centre to the children and youth meant that they would have a nutritious and balanced meal cooked by the mother volunteers, have access to computers and the internet to do their assignments and enjoy opportunities for learning, social interaction and spiritual growth. For the children, the IJ learning centre is a haven and a home away from home where they feel welcomed and loved.

The joy of giving has empowered each one. Love in our hearts for the little ones makes her day complete. Some of the older youth, now high school and university students, who had benefitted from the help in the centre, come back to coach the younger children. The centre has become alive with the children's laughter and that makes life worth living!

WHEN MOTHERS ARE ROLE MODELS

It is not enough to teach the children. Sr felt the call to journey with the mothers. Together with the Parish Social Service Team, she gave formation classes to the mothers. Seventeen of them made it. As they walk together in life, they discover and learn from one another.

The mothers have grown in their relationship with God and become committed parishioners. These are the mothers who had little in life, struggling to live each day, yet, they have offered their service voluntarily in the parish for almost ten years. Prominent church members noticed this group of women maintaining the church cleanliness and ensuring that health measures are met so that the parishioners can safely return to church for mass and devotions.

The Parish Priest recognises and appreciates their invaluable contribution to the church. He exclaims, "When poor people offer their services, it is out of love!" The mothers truly exemplify the spirit of self-giving, worthy of emulation.

With gratitude in their hearts, the mothers, the children and the youth shared, "We have experienced God's love and His manifold blessings especially through the generosity, support and kindness of Sr Neriza, the IJ sisters, their lay partners and benefactors in Singapore. They have been a source of strength for us and shared generously with us and we are truly grateful. Though we have nothing, it does not stop us from wanting to give back to God and the people."

In her little way, Sr and her team have become beacons of hope and encouragement to those underprivileged families in the community.

A Home is where the Heart is. Sr's place is a centre fully open to welcome the little ones. It is a Home where transformation takes place.

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TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

Shared by Sr Neriza IJS (attached to the Singapore Province) serving her people in the Philippines.

"Whatever happens remain always at peace and trust the Lord." – Blessed Nicolas Barre



Children at their studies



Children using the computers



Recreation time



Sr with the adults receiving their parcels of food

Contact:

To communicate with the IJ Sisters about Sr Neriza and her mission, kindly email us at ljsisters.sg@gmail.com

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