

**Week Eight: Sunday — March 13, 2016**  
***Franciscan Novitiate***  
**Da Lat, Vietnam**

**Hello and Goodbye! . . .**

We concluded Jack's whirlwind tour of Vietnam with an *almost three-day* visit to the Franciscan Novitiate here in Da Lat. The novices were most welcoming and curious to meet Jack. Since he and I are the only examples of American Friars that they have met, I was not surprised in the



least when one of the novices commented, "*America Friars VERY BIG!*" All I can say is that we resemble that remark. They were very curious to know about our Province and the ministries we are involved in. I think that they were a bit surprised to find out that a lot of what we do is parish oriented. *The focus here in Vietnam is more toward social ministries such as mental health care, HIV clinics, severely disabled, medical treatment, counseling, and providing a resting place for the unborn.*

*America Friars VERY BIG!*" All I can say is that we resemble that remark. They were very curious to know about our Province and the ministries we are involved in. I think that they were a bit surprised to find out that a lot of what we do is parish oriented. *The focus here in Vietnam is more toward social ministries such as mental health care, HIV clinics, severely*



Jack and I were able to walk up the hill to the neighboring Franciscan Du Sinh parish church of St Joseph. It is staffed by one Franciscan Friar but he is attached to the



novitiate house down below. He eats and prays with the novitiate community but spends most of the day at the parish. The parish has about one thousand families. The novices will regularly attend services at the church for major celebrations. This past week, they attended a morning Mass to participate in the Year of Mercy Day of Prayer with the people of the parish.

Da Lat is a very popular vacation spot for both Vietnamese and foreign visitors. It has a population of about 200,000 and a distinctive hint of French Colonial architecture in many of its buildings. The climate is very pleasant all year around



and so it is a pleasant oasis from the heat of Saigon or Hanoi in the summer time. A popular activity is to visit the Da Lat Market at night time. It is similar to visiting a county fair in the USA. Everything and anything you might want or need can be found in the street stalls. We visited the market one night to breathe in the local flavor.



We also had occasion to visit the Trúc Lâm Temple which is a Zen Buddhist temple outside the town of Da Lat. The monastery houses approximately 180 Buddhist nuns and 140 monks. We were fortunate to be escorted through the convent grounds by three charming nuns. They were as curious about us “*Catholics*” as we were about them. We were told that the formation process to become a full member in the monastery is twelve years. The youngest member is 18 and the oldest is in the 80-year bracket. *The nuns and monks spend upwards of eight hours a day in meditation. They eat only two meals per day and they live a celibate life in the monastery.* Buddhism is very much a part of the fabric of Vietnam. It is estimated that about 80% of the population would claim to be Buddhist. It is not, however as pervasive as what I

observed in Thailand. It might be like Christianity in the USA. *Most people claim to be Christian in our country but how many actually participate in regular worship?*



Da Lat is also home to a fine embroidery industry that produces exquisite pieces of art. The pictures range from flowers to portraits. Some of the pieces take seven to ten months to complete by

as many as seven or eight artisans.



My time here in Vietnam is quickly coming to an end. I am scheduled to depart for the USA on April 12. Each year that I am privileged to be here brings its own graces. I find that my focus on all things



spiritual seems to be heightened. I suppose it’s not surprising, given the fact that I am living the novitiate schedule. Be that as it may, I am thankful for the opportunity to bask in the warmth of the Franciscans in Vietnam. *Their spiritual and fraternal life feeds my soul. The glow remains in my heart when I return to the USA.*



Peace and All Good!

Bruce