

Bankonthip News





Dear friends,

another year is about to end and another Christmas is about to be celebrated.

This year I focused on the words that Pope Francis wrote on the occasion of World Mission Day: "The Church's mission stimulates an attitude of continuous pilgrimage through the various deserts of life".

Also 2017 was a pilgrimage, a sort of small piece of "puzzle" that composes a much larger picture that began about 45 years ago. A pilgrimage made of emotions: the thrill of seeing in front of the mission chapel all the shoes of every size well aligned on the outside, to see inside the little ones and adults waiting to start the day like a family.

The emotion of the meeting of new families of those who have spent their childhood here at the Center: their embrace, their greeting and their smile are always gifts along the way.

At the same time, however, during the pilgrimage we realize that, despite everything, we are never ready for what may happen: we are not ready to experience moments of joy and happiness on the same day and little time after moments of sadness and cry.

Like every year in August Thailand organizes Mother's Day, which coincides with the Queen's birthday. In the Center too we arranged Mother's Day. The parents, especially the mothers of the little guests, reached the mission to spend a night with their children in a party atmosphere. Unfortunately, this year the day was saddened by a tragedy for the family of a child, Jamà, who has been here since May.

The parents of Jamà are very poor but for that special day they went to Maesai with the public service car. On their return they went down to the entrance to the

road that leads to their village. While the husband with the younger son in his arms was paying for the trip, the woman crossed the street, she was hit by a car and died instantly.

This young woman was just 38 years old, eight children, the eldest of whom a young man of 18, the second one a girl of only 15 years: this year she had come to the Center but she could not stay, thinking of her mother with all the little ones to look after. Perhaps the God wanted to prepare her for this tragic moment when she will have to help her father, taking the responsibility of brothers and sisters as a mother for the little ones.

So we decided to welcome along with Jahma a younger sister, Mitì, and an older sister, Milè. A pilgrimage is also made of meetings and in our case of welcome: the doors of the center have in fact often opened this year for friends who wanted to visit us, some for the first time to get rich new experiences, others who feel at home already.

These visits are important and leave an indelible imprint, both in the hearts of the little ones and in the hearts of the "visitors".

The path is also this and perhaps in spite of the years gone by we still feel not ready to face all that is put on the road.

I take this opportunity to give you all my greetings on behalf of the fathers John Chan and Peter Nonthaphat along with all the young guests of the Holy Family Catholic Center. Thank you for your friendship, support, your closeness. Together we wish a peaceful and holy Christmas.

With friendship.

Sport at the Center



Sport, sharing, competitions, music and many smiles were the components that characterized the day of Sunday 19 February at the Holy Family Catholic Center for the annual sport day organized by the group of the "team ngan" of the Center that are the real "staff" of the structure. Started early in the morning with the parade of children and girls divided into two teams, the event officially began with the greeting of Father John Chan and the celebration of mass in the chapel of the mission. Throughout the day the little guests were engaged in individual and team challenges in which the fathers took part personally. As a grand finale, the winning team was rewarded and all the children, tired but happy, were able to "cool off" and rest before starting a new school week.

The missions open to the young

From the extreme north to the center of the country, between the end of March and mid-April, the missions opened their doors to welcome hundreds of teenagers and young people summoned for the traditional week of catechesis scheduled for the summer vacation period. The theme of the 2017 edition of the annual summer camp took its cue from the evangelical words "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" and translated them into meetings, moments of reflection, practical activities and games. In particular, about 210 young people were welcomed in Maepon, while 140 boys and girls were present in Huaytong, coming from neighboring villages. In the last week of March, the Holy Family Catholic Center in Ban Pong welcomed more than 100 youth aged from





Traditions

There are traditions and special moments that each mark the life of the Center: gestures that, while repeating themselves, bring joy and enthusiasm as if it were the first time.

So it is for the reception of the new young guests of the Center: Sunday 11 June, the Center opened its doors for the beginning of the school year, but to make this day in Ban Pong even more special: it was the arrival 33 new guests are added to those already residing in the Center: among the latest arrivals there are 10 young people from neighboring Burma and 23 Thai children.

Just during the party at the beginning of the year, in the typical family atmosphere with which one lives and works in the Center, the new guests have made their official entry into the mission applauded by the girls of the staff and by the fathers present.

The second moment was held a few days later: in Thailand at the beginning of the school year, after about a month of running-in, they organize a thanksgiving day. The little guests, but also the older ones, do it to reward those who welcomed them and take care of them with a real thanksgiving ceremony. So, on June 15th, after the morning mass, the church of the mission was animated for a moment of celebration in which the children gave flowers and letters to the missionaries and to the teachers who assist them in their daily life: a small gesture that summarizes all the love that children feel they receive from adults. Thanks go to the fathers Jonh Chan, Alberto Pensa and Peter Mayoe but also to the girls of the staff who with love organize the days and follow the little ones in their growth just like mothers or older sisters.





Bankonthip expo

On the occasion of 130 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Thailand in different parts of the country they were celebrated initiatives and events that have also involved the school of "cutting and sewing" Bankonthip, born in 1994 in the Holy Family Catholic Center mission.

Particularly during the day on Saturday November 3 in Maesai, the border town between Thailand and Myanmar 15 km away from the mission, were exposed products made by the girls of the Center. Over the years, the craft creations of the laboratory have been appreciated by the authorities so much that Bankonthip has received distinguished visits from governors of the region, also ministers.

"Ban" means "house", "Kon" means "hand" and "Thip" in poetic language means "special": in the original name there is also the peculiarity of the laboratory that is the son of the unmistakable lifestyle of the Center where the 'training experience reflects the simple lifestyle and in harmony with the environment, where you do not make projects too big but try to give the best day after day, based on a feeling of common brotherhood.



Father Chan: "Now it's up to us"



Interview with Father John Chan, current Vicar of Thailand

"In my village, Huay Bong, the Betharram fathers have always been there. Father Fognini led the first group of families to find the place, then father Lanusse and father Salla have been there for many years".

These are the first words of father John Chan Kunu, interviewed by Giovanni Parolari on his last visit to the Betharramite missions in Thailand. The missionaries played an important role in the formation of this young man who now works at the Holy Family Catholic Center in Thailand.

He continued: "I began my studies at the diocesan seminary, but after the death of my mother I had to return home and I stopped studying.

Fortunately, one of Betharram fathers - seeing me at the village - asked me if I wanted to resume studying and maybe become a seminarian.

I immediately answered yes.

I wrote to Father Seguinotte who was at Maepon and I told him that I was ready. That letter is at the origin of my journey in the inter-diocesan minor seminary of Sampran, then I moved to the new seminary of the fathers".

"I was ordained priest on June 28, 2008 in Chiang Mai Cathedral; I have been working at the Center for about one year now and I am very happy because I have the opportunity to make a new experience. Here for me everything is new, I have to learn a new language, I have to visit and get to know the villages. I will try to learn the language as well as possible in order to communicate

without difficulty with people. The villages we follow are 22, twelve in Maesai district, near the Center, and another 10, 160 kilometers south, in Maesuai district ." Father Chan explains what the new experience at the Center is like: "Here I can feel the traces of the Betharram fathers who began the evangelization in the North, French, Italian, Spanish fathers. Today there are only three old Italian fathers left. I often think of the work that has been done all over northern Thailand when there were no roads or easy connections and it is something extraordinary. Now it's up to us to try to carry on their work as best as we can: we are the grandchildren of those missionaries".

The girl became a catechist

Just over 20 years ago at the Holy Family Catholic Center, Chujai, a girl of middle school age, showed up. She was not Catholic, but she was eager to learn the art of cutting and sewing: like many other children she was welcomed with open arms.

She came from the village of Huay Na Kaat, which is more than two and a half hours from the Center and can only be reached by a road that winds its way through an infinite number of curves between tea plantations and banana trees.

Chujai remained at the Center for 8 years and learned to sew clothes and to make embroidery but also a new lifestyle, that of the big family of the center; then she returned to her village.

Almost twenty years after his arrival at the Center, father Alberto, father Peter and Noy faced the road to Huay Na Kaat to attend the inauguration of the new village church and there they met Chujai again.

The young woman runs to meet and embrace the visitors, with a few tears of joy and emotion.

It seems as if time has stopped: yet in the years spent at the center, Chujai received baptism, the only one in her family. When she returned home, she married, has two children and has become a reference point for her village as well as a catechist of over 250 catholics present in the community. Remembering the Center, she said with shining eyes: "Those years were fundamental for me, not only because I was able to study and know the art of sewing, but also because I chose to become Catholic there and to follow a path that brought me where I am today. I am grateful to those who welcomed me. I learned a new lifestyle that I keep and that today I try to pass on to my children ". At the conclusion of the celebration for the new village church, father Alberto Pensa recalled his arrival, about 40 years ago, in the area, not far from the village, after a 5-hour walk from Maesuay. Then he thanked Chujai who with her story and her life, describes concretely what the Center is.





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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

*Padre Alberto Pensa, padre John Chan Kunu, padre Peter Mayoe
e tutti noi dell'Holy Family Catholic Centre*




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