

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate!

I'm writing these notes about my missionary life in Southeast Asia and will relate especially about my 18 ½ years stay in Laos from Nov. 17, 1956 to May 8, 1975. After I was forced out of Laos by the Communist Lao regime in 1975, I then joined six French ex-Laos missionaries and went with them to Indonesia where we arrived at the end of January, 1977 in the city of Jakarta. We were assigned to work in the Indonesian section of Western Borneo which now has the Indonesian name of Kalimantan. I stayed there till June 25, 2005. I obtained Indonesian citizenship in August, 1999.

Sometimes people ask me to explain why I was sent to Laos. During my 6th year in the Oblate seminary in Natick, MA, Archbishop Plumez, OMI gave us a talk about his great need of obtaining more missionaries to help him in his archdiocese in Chad, Africa. At the end of his talk, he firmly assured us that any one of us who would ask to go to his missions in Chad would certainly obtain that obedience from the Superior General. My great desire was to go to the Oblate foreign missions, so I figured that the best way to get there is to take advantage of the privilege we have before our first obedience, i.e. to write to the Superior General in order to tell him what I would like to do or go to. So I wrote and asked to go to the mission area of Archbishop Plumez, OMI.

During the month of June 1956, the Provincial Fr. Ferdinand Richard, OMI came to the seminary to give our first Obedience. When he told me I was assigned for the Mission of Laos, I asked him sheepishly where that country was situated, so he answered: "it's in Indochina!" Well, I didn't dare ask him once more, "where is Indochina"? When I told my mother was on the phone where I was going, she answered simply, "That's far away..."

On October 8, 1956, the day I was departing by ocean liner to France, my parents with my brother Rene and my sister-in-law Beverly came over to say goodbye at port-side. I remember my father telling me that he didn't think he would see me again. He was 71 years old. He died three years later while I was working in the outback of the Sam Neua area in Northern Laos. It took 11 days for the telegram to finally get to me.

I haven't explained yet why I was being sent to Laos instead of Chad in Africa. This came about because Fr. Drouant, OMI who was at that time General Counselor for Asia-Oceania, had visited the French Oblate Mission in Laos and noticed that there was a large group of Americans working at the U.S. Embassy and also a large group working in USAID i.e. United States Agency of International Development. So when Fr. Drouant came back to the General House he advised the Superior General that it would be good to also have a few American Oblates in Laos. That's why Fr. Matt Menger, OMI from San Antonio and I both received obedience for the Oblate Mission in Laos. I believe he chose us because we were both bilingual and would fit in more easily with the French Oblate community working in Northern Laos.

I arrived in Vientiane, the capitol city of Laos on November 17, 1956. Vientiane was considered the administrative capital while Luang Prabang was the royal capitol where the king resided.

Fr. Matt Menger arrived a few days before me and just about a week later he received a telegram informing him that his mother and brother, Fr. Henry Menger, OMI had been killed in an automobile accident. A few days later, Fr. Menger received a telegram from Fr. General telling him to immediately go and help his grieving father in San Antonio. Fr. Matt stayed with his father for one year and then came back to Vientiane, Laos in 1957. He was then assigned as pastor of the Catholic American community residing in the city of Vientiane where the majority of the Americans were stationed.

As for myself, I spent my first year learning the Lao language while residing at the Oblate Grammar and Junior High School which was located in the small rural town of Paksone. I also helped teaching the students in the higher grades who understood French. On weekends I would go on horseback to celebrate Mass at a couple of outlying villages.

In December, 1957, I was assigned by Bishop Etienne Loosdregt, OMI to work as an assistant to Fr. Rene Charrier, OMI who had been working alone for a few years on a 4,500 ft mountain evangelizing the Hmong people and also taking care of their sick. This mountain was a long plateau about 20 miles long and 3 or 4 miles wide with a total of around 10 Hmong villages living on it. Of course there was no clinic on this mountain so practically every day people would come to ask for medicine on account of malaria, diarrhea, worms, infections, colds, toothaches etc. So for the first couple of months, I paid special attention to how Fr. Charrier took care of those different ailments and especially how he sometimes gave a Novocain shot in someone's gum and then pulled out a tooth!

I was also learning the Hmong language and practicing to speak it with the people in the village. It is a tricky language because it is tonal with seven different tones to it, which means the same word can have different meanings according to the tone you use when you pronounce it. This can be quite frustrating sometimes after saying a whole sentence, but they don't understand you because you messed up on one of the tones.

Almost two months after my arrival on this 4500 ft. high plateau, Fr. Charrier told me it was his turn to go on his six month home leave and would I be willing to be on my own during that time. I answered him that he should go for his vacation and not to worry about me being alone for 6 months. After his departure, I followed his example of taking care of the sick who came asking for help and also pulling out teeth every now and then.

One day someone came over and asked me to give an injection to his sick horse. I refused at first, but he kept insisting because he had walked all day to get to me, so I finally gave in and told him I would try giving his horse a penicillin injection. Then I hurriedly started reading for "veterinarian" information in Fr. Charrier's veterinary book but unfortunately there was no information about giving an injection to a horse. So I decided to give it in the horse's rump where there is a lot of flesh but also a lot of danger of getting kicked by the "patient". However, the owner of the horse assured me his horse was very tame and would not kick me. When I tried the first time to give the injection, the needle just simply bent completely because it was not sturdy enough to penetrate horsehide. So I tried to take a bigger and tougher needle that would certainly penetrate the horse's skin but also augment the pain in the horse's rump. When I tried the second time, the needle penetrated OK but the horse started jumping up and

down so I hurriedly pushed the penicillin in its rump while staying close to the horse with great difficulty. I don't know if that penicillin injection cured that horse later on, but at least, as the saying goes, I had done my good deed for the day.

As time went on, the political situation started to deteriorate in our mission area on account of propaganda activities by communist rebels. They even started to have propaganda sessions at night accompanied with dancing just about only 100 feet from our mission house. At this unfortunate turn of events, Bishop Loosdregt decided to close the mission, and he then assigned me to Sam Neua which was a new mission area where dozens of Hmong villages were asking for priests to come and speak to them about Jesus.

Towards the end of the year 1958, I arrived at our Sam Neua Oblate Mission which had been newly opened up by Fr. Yves Bertrais, OMI several months before my arrival. I was assigned to assist Fr. Benjamin Rancoeur, OMI in the preparation of catechumens from 16 Hmong villages that had newly converted to Jesus' Gospel Message. These villages were scattered in a wide mountain terrain area and varied from one to four hours walk away from our central mission in the town of Sam Neua. Fr. Rancoeur took on eight of the villages and I took on the other eight with the help of a catechist who accompanied me in my weekly visits to those eight villages. We instructed them during two years in order to prepare them for Baptism. No one knew how to read or write so they simply learned our basic Christian prayers by repeating them with our help. I was amazed to witness how quickly they were able to say all their prayers by heart.

We were, altogether, six Oblates working at our mission in the town of Sam Neua. Fr. Yves Bertais, who was the Superior of the mission, was forming a group of Hmong catechists. Frs. Jean Subra and Jacques Brix were forming Khmu catechists, and Fr. Adrien Gaillard was preparing catechumens for Baptism in seven Hmong villages.

There were also two other Oblates who were stationed in a Thai Dong village almost 30 miles east of Sam Neua town. They were Fr. Charles Loison, OMI and Ernest Dumont, OMI. They would come and visit us every now and then. Their village was just a few miles from the North Vietnam border! During our "spare" time, in the space of just two years, we were able to build a two story combination residence and classroom for Hmong catechists, a one story combination residence and classroom for Khmu catechists, a good size chapel which could accommodate Christians coming from two dozen villages for the Sunday Liturgy, and finally a convent to house two or three nuns who would come to help in the Sam Neua mission apostolate.

During those two years setting up our mission, we were also greatly helped by Brother Oliver Dallaire, a Canadian from the Voluntas Dei Congregation, and also by a Canadian volunteer, Claude Veronneau.

We had just finished building the convent when a company of Communist rebel soldiers seized a high hill just a few miles from Sam Neua town and then firing mortar shells into the town. It was close to noon time and I was in the process of finishing painting the doors of the convent. We then immediately all got together with Fr. Bertrais, our superior, in order to decide what to do in this very dangerous situation. There was no point in having all eight of us becoming prisoners in a Communist take-over so it

was decided that two would remain with the Christians of the Sam Neua mission and the six others would flee on foot to the Xieng Khouang Province about 120 miles away. Fr. Yves Bertrais was remaining for the Hmong Christians and Fr. Jean Subra was remaining for the Khmu Christians. I was leaving with Frs. Benjamin Rancoeur, Jacques Brix and Adrian Gaillard, OMI, Bro. Oliver Dallaire, Voluntas Dei, and lay volunteer, Claude Veronneau. Seven Lao people were also accompanying us to help show us the way on the jungle trail.

We left most of our belongings behind because we would have to walk on mountainous terrain which means we had to travel light and conserve our energy. I took only about 5 lbs. of rice, a blanket and a rain cap. We left around 1230 PM and just two hours later the Communist soldiers entered the town. I found out later on from Fr. Bertrais that they hunted for me at the mission house because I was a hated American spy. They went into my room and looked at everything.

We walked at a good pace because we figured the rebel soldiers would be pursuing us relentlessly. At nightfall we started climbing up a 5000 ft. mountain. It soon began to rain but we just kept on climbing on a steep, muddy and slippery mountain trail. When we finally arrived close to the summit as about 1100 PM, we decided to lie down on that steep mountain slope and try to get some sleep before continuing again early in the morning.

During the afternoon of the second day, we met some people walking towards us and warning us that there were enemy soldiers heading in our direction. On hearing this information, we stopped immediately, and then deliberated among us four Oblates what to do next – keep on going or turn back and give ourselves up to the pursuing rebel soldiers. Fr. Rancoeur and Gaillard thought it would be more prudent to turn back and avoid being gunned down by the oncoming rebel soldiers, but Fr. Brix and myself thought it was better to keep going. I remember saying something like this: “When we get close to the enemy, we’ll hide in the jungle till the enemy goes by us, and then we’ll be able to keep going.” Fortunately, the opinion of Fr. Brix and me prevailed so we all decided to keep going. About one hour later on the trail, we found out very happily that the presence of enemy soldiers ahead of us was just a false rumor!

During the afternoon of the sixth day, on Oct.1, 1960, we finally arrived in a safe area in the Christian village of Ban Ban located along route 7. We were received with fine hospitality by Fr. Vincent L’Henoret, OMI who was the pastor of the Ban Ban parish which included a group of Christian villages in the surrounding area.

A few days later, we were able to board a plane at the Xieng Khouang airport (Lat Mouang) and were flown to the capital city of Vientiane.

After our arrival in Vientiane, we were soon attacked by a group of Lao rebel soldiers under the command of Colonel Kong Le. They called themselves “neutralists”. They succeeded in taking over the Vientiane airport and, with .81 mm mortars, started shelling the open city of Vientiane. About eight of us took refuge for 3 or 4 days underneath the thick cement stairs of the Vientiane Cathedral grammar school. After a couple of days, I felt quite bored eating and sleeping underneath those stairs so I suggested to Fr. Marcello Zago (who later became Superior General) that we both try sleeping above in

one of the school's classrooms. I remember mentioning to Fr. Zago that the safest and sturdiest place to sleep would be in the corner of the classroom. So I had just finished lying down in my corner when I noticed that there was a window about 4 ft. directly above my head, so I put my right arm over my face right away because I figured that window would shatter if a mortar shell fell close to the wall. Right after taking that safety precaution, a mortar shell exploded close to the wall of my corner and caused the window to shatter, and a good size piece of glass about 10 inches long fell on my right arm protecting my face. I thank God I had that safety precaution inspiration. After hearing that "warning bell" from the mortar shell, Fr. Zago and I both agreed that it would be safer to go back and sleep underneath the cement stairs. It was later reported that this .81 mm mortar shelling caused about 500 casualties among the city's civilian population. Fortunately, Colonel Kong Le's followers were quite rapidly dislodged from the Vientiane airport and forced to retreat finally to the Xieng Khouang Province in 1961.

I took my home leave in 1961 and also followed an Oblate sponsored theology and spirituality refresher course in Rome which finished in February, 1962. This course had also the name of "second novitiate".

When I came back to Laos in February, 1962, there were already many large groups of refugees scattered in Northern Laos especially in many areas in the Xieng Khouang Province. The Oblates had been evangelizing in the Xieng Khouang Province from the 1940's to 1961 when three Oblate priests were executed while the six remaining Oblates were forced to leave their mission stations. Fathers Louis Leroy, OMI, Michael Coquelet, OMI, and Vincent L'Henoret, OMI, were executed while they were courageously serving their flock. Two other Oblates, Fathers Jean Wauthier, OMI, and Jean-Marie Ollivier were about to be executed by a Communist rebel firing squad when, fortunately, an army captain hurriedly rode up in a jeep and stopped the execution. Then those two Oblates were able to return safely to Vientiane.

The Catholic villages that had been evangelized by Oblates did not want to be under Communist control, so they fled and took refuge in different refugee areas where large groups of refugees were already assembled. Each large group would dig out a dirt airstrip in order to be able to receive supplies and also to be able to evacuate the sick. They also set up guerilla outposts on the surrounding hills in order to protect the refugees from enemy attack. All these large refugee groups, guerilla outposts and military movements of the guerilla army in the Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang Provinces were part of the secret war in Laos. All these areas were off limits to visitors, tourists and journalists. Only Americans directly connected with supplying aid to the refugees or to the guerilla army were allowed in these areas. A French Oblate, Father Jean Subra, OMI, often went to the Vientiane airport in order to get permission to go visit the Catholic groups of refugees in these refugee areas but all his efforts were useless. So when I came back to Vientiane in 1962, I went to see the CIA guerilla army coordinator and insisted that those Catholic refugees had a right and a spiritual need to be visited by a Catholic priest. I also said he would not have to worry about my having to give a regular report of my activities to the Vatican! To my great relief he gave me permission to visit them, which meant not only the Catholics in the refugee areas but also the Catholics who were stationed in military outposts that I would usually visit by helicopter. So, for the next 13 years from 1962-1975, my main work was to visit these small Catholic refugee groups where I would celebrate Mass and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I would also visit the Catholic

soldiers in their military outposts where I would usually celebrate Mass, and as for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I would give either individual or general absolution according to circumstances.

I remember visiting one outpost on a hill top that was only about 150 yards away from an enemy outpost also positioned on a hill top. In fact, we could hear their voices when they called out loudly among themselves. In late afternoon, when I was offered a small 4 ½ foot high thatch roof hut to celebrate Mass, I asked that they dig a hole about one foot deep at the exact place where I would be standing to celebrate Mass so that I would not be obliged to bend my head and back during the whole Mass celebration. They dug the hole gladly and so I was able to celebrate Mass without any back problem which I experienced occasionally. After spending the night in one of the thatch covered huts, I left early next morning for about a 3 hour hike with two soldiers serving as my guides and vigilant companions. I was glad that there was an early morning mist which kept us concealed from the neighboring enemy outpost just a couple of hundred yards away from the trail we were using. The mist was blown away about one hour later and by then we were already walking in a safe area.

I will always remember the night of the 10th of August, 1967. On the day of August 10th, I had flown by helicopter to visit a group of Lao government soldiers who had just recently liberated an area by repulsing some rebel communist soldiers. The army leader, who was a captain, invited me to sleep in his 5 foot high thatch covered hut that had quite a large bamboo bed which could accommodate 3 or 4 persons. We had gone to bed around 11 PM. Suddenly, around midnight, a B-40 mm. rocket shell exploded close to us killing those soldiers who were sleeping close to the captain's hut. So, right away the captain and I sat side by side on the bed in order to hurriedly slip on our sneakers and take refuge in a trench that had been dug behind the captain's quarters in case of an attack. As we were putting on our sneakers, some rebel soldiers fired at us from close range and one of the bullets went in the captain's mouth and came out close below his ear. He told me he has been hit so I grasp his head right away and saw the blood coming down from under his ear. Some soldiers immediately ran to our rescue. They brought the captain and also guided me to the trench which was about 3 ½ feet deep. The rebel soldiers fired at us for about an hour, but fortunately, the Lao government soldiers were able to repulse them. At the beginning of the firefight, the first thought that came to me was this: "Lord Jesus, I still haven't proven my love for you enough, so please give me some more years to prove it." Well, He has given me already 45 extra years and I still haven't really proven it.

While we were in the trench, I noticed that the captain kept loosing blood so I ardently asked the medic to give him some IV fluid in order to keep him alive, but he refused because he said he would need some light to do that which would give our position away to the enemy. I finally convinced the medic to do it by telling him that I would use my flashlight and cover the beam of light with my hand in such a way that the light would not be seen from the surrounding area of the trench. I believe that IV fluid helped save his life. In the morning, he was evacuated by helicopter to a hospital just about one hour flight away. The captain recuperated from his wound, but his sense of balance was quite diminished from the damage caused by that bullet penetrating below his ear. The captain was a Buddhist. He thanked me heartily the next time I met him after he left the hospital.

Now I will write about my work visiting the small group of Catholic refugees who for the past one or two years had been without the presence of priests to celebrate Mass, bless marriages, and administer the sacraments especially of Baptism and Reconciliation. I will also relate about organizing and supplying two leper villages.

I was enabled to do all of this thanks to the very generous help and support of Edgar Buell who was familiarly called "Pop" by his American friends and "Mr. Pop" by the refugees. Pop had been a farmer in Indiana. After the death of his wife in the 1950's, he decided to sign up with the "International Volunteer Service" (IVS) which at that time was helping the Lao government in the agricultural and veterinarian field. When Pop first arrived in Laos, he was assigned to an area about one mile from the Xiang Khouang Lat Houang airport. During his work in that area, he helped an Oblate, Fr. Jean Wauthier set up a permanent rice growing paddy for his village people. He also started helping out many Hmong refugees who had abandoned their villages in order not to be under Communist rule. His work for the refugees soon became known by the "U.S. Agency for International Development" (USAID) in Vientiane, so they offered him a U.S. government job in USAID which Pop accepted.

In his new job, Pop organized regular "rice drops" by Air America transport planes for the scattered refugee groups in the Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua provinces. He also was distributing to refugee groups household goods such as pots and pans, utensils, blankets and mosquito nets. Sometimes during very long periods, Pop would ask me to help distribute pots and pans or mosquito nets. One time he asked me to distribute a 4-seater plane load of "hot spices" and to give an "equal" share of spices to the heads of families lining up in a single file, military style.

One day Pop mentioned to me that whenever one or more families lost their homes in a fire along with household goods such as pots and pans, tinsels, blankets and mosquito nets, he would help replace all of that on the condition that they make their own appeal through their county or village leader. Not long after that conversation, I visited a Khmu village that had been evangelized by an Oblate, Fr. Henri Delcros who had been obliged to leave his parishioners on account of a Communist take-over, but about 3 years later I was able to visit this village in order to celebrate Mass and administer Baptism for 12 babies and some were not the silent type.

On my arrival in the village, I was told that seven families had lost their homes and all their household goods by fire. I told them that they could get help from "Mr. Pop" if they made their request through a county or village leader. A little later on, the county leader told me that none of the families had made any request through him. I answered him that they must make a request through him in order to get help from "Mr. Pop". Later on in the evening about 8 PM, while I was sitting alone in the long living room of Fr. Delcros' rectory, suddenly two young men entered through the door without knocking and headed towards me with army rifles on their shoulders. The first thought that came to me was "These guys must want to kill me, so I have to "try" and show that I am not afraid." So I got up from my chair immediately and walked right up to them face to face and told them "You are being extremely impolite entering my house with your guns on your shoulders. That goes completely against a much respected Lao tradition that obliges anyone entering someone's house to lay aside on the floor any kind of dangerous weapon he is carrying such as a machete or a firearm." They were taken aback by my words

of criticism and just stood staring at me and me staring at them. Then I said, "Let's just sit down and discuss the problem that made you come to see me". To my great "relief", they laid their guns in the corner of the room and sat down and started telling me why they had come. It was because they had heard I was not going to tell "Mr. Pop" to help them concerning the seven homes destroyed by fire. Then I told them that the condition to get help from "Mr. Pop" was to make their request through their village leader who happened to be the county leader in that area. And, I added that "I will gladly bring that written request to "Mr. Pop" and tell him about your terrible loss of seven homes by fire. "My explanation satisfied them and so they left me on peaceful terms. There was also the home of the village catechist next door to the rectory. Later on this catechist came to Vientiane for a training mission and he told Fr. Delcours that those two armed young men had really come to the rectory with the intention to kill me.

The Oblates, Fr. Jean Subro, Fr. Henri Delcros and Fr. Jean Wauthier were forming Khmu catechists in Vientiane, while the other Oblates, Frs. Yves Bertrais, Rene Charnier, and Daniel Tailley were forming Hmong catechists also in Vientiane. Whenever a catechist was sufficiently trained, he would be assigned to work among one of the Catholic refugee groups in the Xieng Khouang province. Then I would ask my good friend, Pop, to have him flown to the area of his new assignment. I would also, of course, accompany the catechist. After a few years, I spent a lot of my time visiting the different areas where the Hmong and Khmu catechists had been assigned. Thanks to another good friend, Dr. Charles Weldon, MD, I was able to keep the catechists supplied with basic medicines to help the sick refugees who came to them for help. This help was given free of charge and without discrimination between Christians and non-Christians.

Dr. Weldon Arrived in Laos in the early 1960's. His main work consisted of setting up clinics that would afford medical help for the many scattered refugee groups. He was later assisted by medics Don Dugan and Steve Schofield who were of great help to me. During his first year visiting refugee villages, Dr. Weldon would sometimes ask me to accompany him in order to help translate the Hmong or Lao languages of the patients explaining their ailments to him. I remember one day when we were both asked by General Vang Pao (leader of the Hmong guerilla army) to please go right away to help a refugee group that had just been stricken by a measles epidemic and which had already been the cause of 30 deaths among children and, especially, babies. There were about 1500 people in that refugee group. Measles, by themselves, are not the cause of death, but it is the throat infection that is triggered by the measles that causes death if the child is not treated rapidly with antibiotics. Dr. Weldon worked three full days treating the children and babies without anyone dying. Normally we would start about seven in the morning, but the third day fell on a Sunday and, usually, when I visited this refugee group, I would celebrate Mass about 8 AM for the Catholic group of refugees. So, about 6:30 in the morning I asked Dr. Weldon if he wanted to start again at 7 AM because, if he wanted to start at that time, I would not celebrate Mass for the Catholic group. So, he answered to go right ahead and celebrate Mass because he would start seeing the patients only about 9:00 AM. In the aftermath, Dr. Weldon kept telling his friends that Fr. Luke had asked his "permission" to celebrate Mass on Sunday.

Dr. Weldon's wife, Pat, was also a medical doctor who was helping the refugees. They had three children, Becky, Walter and Raymond. I had a standing invitation to visit them whenever I happened to be in Vientiane. So I had "many" enjoyable visits and meals in their home close to the scenic Mekong river.

Now it's time to get back to Pop who established his base of operations close to a Hmong village with the name of Sam Thong. After a dirt airstrip about 900 ft long was completed, Sam Thong became the central hub for small one engine planes flying in and flying out with refugee supplies. Pop also had a long warehouse built to store these refugee supplies that were flown in from Vientiane. He used a small section at one end of the warehouse for both his own and his assistants' living quarters. He had a 7 foot wide bamboo bed which he would share with me when I slept at Sam Thong. Whenever I was planning to visit a refugee village, I would wait for a plane that happened to be transporting refugee supplies close to the area of the refugee group I wanted to visit. At Sam Thong there was also a hospital for the sick refugees and wounded soldiers.

I would regularly visit all the patients whenever I returned to Sam Thong after a two or three day visit to a refugee group. Most of these patients were non-Catholic. They believed in good and evil spirits. They didn't worry about the good spirits, but only about the evil spirits which were the cause of their sickness. I would assure them that I would pray for their recovery which they usually heartily appreciated. Sometimes, I would try to convince a wounded soldier to let the surgeon cut off his foot on account of gangrene. Oftentimes, two or three years later, I would happen to meet a refugee who would thank me again for having visited him or her in the Sam Thong hospital.

There was an American doctor working full time in that hospital. He was replaced every six months. Later on, a Lao doctor who had graduated from a medical school in France also started working full-time in that hospital.

General Vang Pao established his base of operations close to a village called Long Tieng, which also gave its name to that base of operations. It had a longer dirt airstrip than the one at Sam Thong, so this allowed heavier, two engine aircraft to land and take off without any problem, i.e. if weather permitted and it was not too windy.

All the military supplies were flown from Vientiane and then helicopters would transport these supplies to the scattered guerilla outposts. Whenever I was planning to visit a guerilla outpost, I would wait for a helicopter that had military supplies or some soldiers to transport to the surrounding area of the outpost I wanted to visit. I would stay overnight at the outpost and, usually, celebrate Mass in the morning. Evening was not a good or appropriate time to celebrate Mass on account of a possible enemy attack taking advantage of darkness. After Mass, I would wait during the day for another helicopter to pick me up.

I already wrote about the two Oblates, Frs. Jean Wauthier and Jean-Marie Ollivier who narrowly escaped death by firing squad after being taken by some Communist rebels. Later on, Fr. Wauthier started teaching at the Khmu catechetical school in Vientiane to assist Frs. Henri Delcros and Jean Subra who founded that school. While teaching at that school, Fr. Wauthier expressed an ardent desire to work again with his Khmu parishioners who had taken refuge with another Hmong refugee group close

to the old Khmu village of Ban Na. So he asked me to try and get permission from his old friend “Mr. Pop” to go and minister again to his refugee parishioners located close to Ban Na. This area was normally off-limits for visitors, but finally Pop gave the OK for Fr. Wauthier to come and reside again with his Khmu parishioners at Ban Na which had also become the name of the location of the two Hmong and Khmu refugee groups. Fr. Wauthier was really overjoyed when he got the OK to be with his people again. I accompanied him to Ban Na and you can well imagine the joyful reception he received from his old parishioners. They already had a chapel that they had built shortly after they arrived at their new refugee location at Ban Na. Before Fr. Wauthier’s arrival, I used to celebrate Mass in that chapel and administer the sacrament of Reconciliation whenever I visited them. I always stayed at least two nights.

After Fr. Wauthier’s arrival at Ban Na, I would visit him, bring him his mail and sometimes canned food from his parents in France. His Khmu parishioners shared the little they had with him. At regular intervals, an Air America C-46 transport plane would drop rice for the two Hmong and Khmu refugee groups. Unfortunately, the Hmong army captain, who was the leader of the two refugee groups, set up an unfair distribution of rice between the two groups. He would give the lion’s share to the Hmong group and the pauper’s share to the Khmu group. Sometimes when Fr. Wauthier would visit the Hmong group of refugees, he would notice some of them feeding their pigs with the excess amount of rice unfairly allotted to them. Consequently, he went to the Hmong army captain and told him about this unfair distribution of rice which permitted some of the Hmong families to feed the pigs with their excess allotment of rice. This criticism of the rice distribution did not, of course, please the captain, but Fr. Wauthier rightly considered it to be his duty to protest such an unfair situation. However, his protest fell on deaf ears because this unjust distribution of rice just kept on going as before.

Finally, after a couple of years, Fr. Wauthier and I came up with a plan to choose a new location for the Khmu refugees that the Air America rice drops would be uniquely for them. So, Fr. Wauthier, accompanied by a few Khmu elders, went on a survey to find a new refugee location. They finally chose a deep valley about 3 hours walk from Sam Thong. I asked Pop if he agreed to their moving to this new location and if he could he arrange for regular Air America rice to be dropped to them. Pop answered “yes” to both questions, so I quickly went to see Fr. Wauthier at Ban Na and told him the good news. It was at least a full day’s walk to this new location, so Fr. Wauthier and his parishioners, with their meager possessions on their backs, walked willingly to their new location which they gave the name of Hin Tang.

Of course, the Hmong army captain and Hmong refugees at Ban Na were very angry about the Khmu refugees abandoning Ban Na because they would not be able anymore to take an exorbitant share of the Air America rice drops. So, they complained to their leader, General Van g Pao, at Long Tieng. I heard from others that the general was angry when he heard about the Khmu refugees moving out of Ban Na because it had been done without his permission. As for myself, I thought it was sufficient to get the permission from Pop and the thought never came to me that I should also ask permission from General Vang Pao. As an afterthought, I figured it was providential because I believe he would probably not have given permission.

The Khmu refugees were real glad to be by themselves in their new location of Hin Tang. They were now receiving a sufficient amount of rice for each family because it was being distributed among them equally and fairly. Later on, Fr. Wauthier found a way of piping water into the Hin Tang valley from a nearby small mountain stream. He used as pipes, large hollow bamboo trees which were attached to each other. He asked me to try and get him 10 empty 50-gallon fuel drums which could be used for storing up the water for the needs of all the refugee families which were about 40 in number. I was able to obtain 10 drums from an Air America friend at Sam Thong whose job was to send back the empty drums to Vientiane. He was an ex-army colonel and I guess he felt that this was an acceptable charitable "diversion" of those 10 drums to help the Hin Tang Khmu refugees. The refugees themselves carried the empty drums for a 3 hour walk to their refugee locations at Hin Tang.

Every day, Fr. Wauthier spent time taking care of the sick and also pulling out teeth when necessary. Every Saturday afternoon, he would hear Confessions for one or two hours in preparation for the Sunday morning Mass.

A few years later, Fr. Wauthier's missionary endeavors came to a tragic end. One day, he decided to go visit some Catholic Khmu soldiers who were fighting as members of the Neutralist army. This fighting was a dangerous thing to do because the Hmong guerillas fighters considered the Neutralist soldiers as being an enemy. Maybe Fr. Wauthier did not realize the degree of hostility between those two groups. He had to walk at least two days in order to meet and give spiritual assistance to these Catholic Khmu soldiers. On his way back, he stopped to talk to a group of Hmong soldiers at a guerilla outpost close to the trail. I suppose he told them about his visit to the Catholic Khmu soldiers. He probably also told them he was planning to go and visit some Khmu families still living in the old Khmu village of Ban Na. After he left, the Hmong radioman likely sent a message about Fr. Wauthier's visit to some Khmu Neutralist soldiers and that he was planning to stop and visit some families at the old Khmu village of Ban Na. When Fr. Wauthier arrived at the Khmu village of Ban Na, he stayed in the home of one of the families. Late in the evening, some Hmong soldiers at an outpost about one-half mile away, set up a mock attack by starting to fire mortar shells the fell in the vicinity of the old Khmu village of Ban Na. So, immediately Fr. Wauthier rounded up some children and brought them to a safer area close to the village. While the children lied down, he walked back and forth close to them and probably praying for their safety. When suddenly a soldier appeared with his gun aimed at him, Fr. Wauthier exclaimed, "don't shoot, I'm the priest over here". But the soldier fired three bullets which probably killed Fr. Wauthier instantly. His body was flown to Sam Thong the next day. His body was placed on a bed in the Sam Thong hospital. On the same day, Pop sent a plane to pick me up at a refugee village in the Sam Neua Province area. When I viewed Fr. Wauthier's body in the hospital, the Lao doctor showed me the three bullet wounds and told me all three were fatal. I accompanied his body on an Air America plane to Vientiane.

Here are the inspiring words of Fr. Roland Jacques, one concerning the missionary life of Fr. Jean Wauthier: "In 1967, Fr. Jean Wauthier, the indefatigable apostle of the refugees, enamored of justice, champion for the rights of the poor, is eliminated by another faction; he leaves his people steeped in sorrow, who exclaim "We have lost a father!" Jean had faced death more than once. He was ready; he gave up his life for love of his own people." (The Oblate, Fr. Roland Jacques is the official Postulator for the Causes of Canonization of the 17 Martyrs of Laos).

I wish to note here that most of the details I have just written about the circumstances of Fr. Wauthier's death come from the Oblate, Fr. Jean Subra, who was fluent in the Khmu language and was able to get this detailed information from some of Fr. Wauthier's parishioners.

As I mentioned a "few" pages ago, I will now relate about the time I organized and helped supply two leper villages. The Hmong and Lao people in general are deadly afraid of leprosy because they think it is highly contagious which is incorrect. In fact, among contagious diseases, leprosy is one of the least contagious. For instance, I've seen families where one parent is a leper but the other parent is not a leper and neither are the children lepers, but some may catch it only after a number of years. On the other hand, unfortunately, Hmong and Lao people in general do not realize how highly contagious can be the disease of tuberculosis in their families. For instance, they will not take precautionary measures when living with a member in the family who had been stricken with T.B. It is difficult to make them realize the danger of being close to a T.B. patient whenever he is coughing.

Now, coming back to the problem of leprosy, a leper was usually obliged to live outside of his village and depend on relatives who would bring him some rice that he would cook himself on a small fire. This meant he had no social life or companionship. That is what decided me to invite some lepers to set up a village so that they would be able to have a social life together. I told them they would not have to worry about rice because they would receive, like the other refugees, regular allotments of rice from my friend "Pop" as Sam Thong. They would also receive household items such as pots and pans, plates, utensils, blankets and mosquito nets which would make it easier for them to live in their new village. They already knew how to build their own huts with bamboo walls and thatched roofs. Eleven persons decided to live together in the first leper village. Two of the lepers were married and each family had a young child. Their new village was about 2 miles away from the nearest Hmong refugee village. However, about 2 years later, the Hmong refugees in that village told me that I must move them further away because they were afraid of catching leprosy from the lepers 2 miles away! So, the lepers were obliged to choose a new area in a deep valley which was about 3 hours walk away from the nearest Hmong village located on a mountain slope. I figured the lepers would not have any more problems to live in this valley which was so far away from other Hmong villages. However, about one year later, when a Hmong army captain living in the village on the mountain slope found out about the presence of lepers 3 hours walk away, he immediately sent out an order for the lepers to move somewhere else; otherwise he was threatening to fire mortar shells at them. He also complained to General Vang Pao that those lepers had to move out as soon as possible. Finally, Gen. Vang Pao told me to find a new location for the leper village. I'm quite sure he did not agree with the unfair and ridiculous complaint from the army captain, but on the other hand, he did not want to antagonize his army subordinate who was ridiculously afraid of catching leprosy from lepers located about 9 miles away! Now how do I find a new location in a hurry before the lepers start receiving mortar shells?

Fortunately, I was able to contact a friendly Hmong county leader (tasseng) who was willing to let the lepers settle down in a valley about one hour's walk away from his mountain Hmong refugee area. He even walked with me and led me down in that valley where the lepers would be allowed to live. When I told the lepers to get ready to travel with their meager belongings by helicopter to their new location, they asked me this "dismaying" question: "Why didn't you tell us last year before we planted our rice

that we would have to move this year? Now our rice is nearly ready for the harvest, but you say we have to move quickly, which means we won't have a chance to harvest our rice." If course, their rightful complaint saddened me because rice planting using the slash and burn system as a preparation demands arduous labor, so it was very disappointing for these lepers not to be able to harvest their rice. But, on the other hand, they were also in a hurry to leave on account of the brutal army captain who was threatening to fire deadly mortar shells at them if they did not leave quickly. They were moved by helicopter rotations to their new valley location about 100 miles away in northern Xieng Khouang Province. After they finished building their huts in this new location, I would visit them every now and then and bring them some basic medicines to treat their leprosy and other ailments such as malaria and diarrhea. Fortunately, I had received from the United States Catholic Medical Mission Board a large shipment of very effective medicine to treat leprosy. This medicine was of great help to the lepers, because by taking just a few pills a week, it would stem the process of leprosy in their organism and give them the possibility to work and prepare their rice fields for planting. At one of my visits, one of the lepers was stricken by a grave ailment, so I decided to bring him with me to the Sam Thong hospital where he could be treated by the Lao doctor who was also the hospital director. A few days later, that doctor told me not to take a leper to the hospital again because the presence of a leper patient will scare the other patients who are deadly afraid of catching leprosy by contagion. A few months later, at another visit to the leper village, I saw a leper who had a very grave attack of malaria and who really needed the help of a doctor, but I did not bring him to the Sam Thong refugee hospital on account of the strict warning the doctor had given me a few months before. At my next visit to the leper village, I anxiously asked about the condition of the leper with a grave case of malaria and they answered me that on account of his prolonged sickness, he had committed suicide by throwing himself into the rushing torrent that flowed by the side of their village. Imagine how saddened I was about his sudden death because he could maybe have been saved at the Sam Thong hospital.

The lepers had been staying about 4 years in this village when suddenly a serious threat erupted because some communist rebels were approaching their area. I felt that the best solution was to transfer them to Father Jean-Marie Ollivier's leper village at Vang Vieng which was about 120 miles away. It took 4 helicopters a full day of rotations to make that transfer to Vang Vieng. I remember I was going on the last rotation of the remaining helicopter. After the last lepers and their belongings were loaded on the helicopter, I noticed right away that the helicopter was quite full. However, the lepers pleaded with me so that their dogs could be brought out also. When I asked the flight engineer if the dogs could go also, he had to say no because the helicopter was already fully loaded to its weight limit. So as we were all sitting in the helicopter ready to take flight, we have to gaze at about five dogs looking at us with pleading eyes to be also taken with us.

Of course, this new arrival of lepers in Father Ollivier's leper village was an extra burden for him because he already had a good number of lepers to take care of. However, he willingly received them as his own. I saw him once washing the festering wound on the foot of a leper. He spent a lot of time treating the lepers with their ailments such as malaria and diarrhea.

One day he asked me to help find money so he could buy a small engine to pulverize cassava which the lepers harvested in large quantities. A few weeks later, the Freemason group in the city of Vientiane

asked me to give a talk at one of their meetings. This surprised me but anyway I said OK because I figured I would take advantage in my talk to drum up some money for Father Ollivier's cassava engine project. When I started talking about that project in their meeting, I was "hotly" opposed by a French agriculture expert in their group who had spent many years in Africa and who had greatly deplored the tradition of Africans to depend on cassava for their staple food because it was hardly nutritious. Now this really threw me off balance because I had never studied about the degree of nutritious content in cassava. I don't remember how I "wiggled" out of this debate, but anyway, the Freemasons did give me some money for that "shaky" cassava project, and so Father Ollivier was able to buy that cassava pulverizer, which the lepers greatly appreciated because they no longer had to pulverize cassava by hand.

I will now relate how I helped set up a second leper village. One day, I received an appeal asking me to come and help some lepers who lived in the vicinity of a Hmong village. This village was in a very remote area of the Xieng Khouang Province and was also difficult of access as I soon found out. First of all, I had to be flown to a short airstrip which was still an "uncertain" number of hours walking distance from my destination at that Hmong village. After about one hour of searching and pleading, I finally found two guides more or less willing to guide me. We left about 3:00 PM and I hadn't had a chance to have lunch. After walking about only one hour, my guides stopped me and told me they would look for two other guides to replace them. I tried to persuade them to stay with me, but to no avail! So, then it took another hour to persuade two new guides to help me. Now, it was already about 5:00 PM just one hour from darkness. As darkness overtook us, we had just started going up a difficult mountain trail with thick underbrush and sometimes felled trees across the trail. Fortunately, I had my flashlight. As we're struggling along, the last two guides are talking to each other, but they don't figure I understand them. At one point they make this remark: "Those foreigners are really strange people because the like to walk in the dark". Those words really upset me so I told them right off: "It is your fault we're walking in the dark because it took so long for you to decide to guide me a couple of hours ago". Well, my sudden outburst rather changed their line of conversation.

When we finally arrived at the top of this mountain trail about 10:00 PM, we were planning to go straight on down the other side of the mountain but, fortunately, a man living in a small hut by the side of the trail heard us walking by, so he called out to us and asked where we were planning to go. He warned us that if we kept on walking straight down on the other sides of the mountain, then we will be heading straight down into a communist rebel area. So he told us to take a right on an intersecting trail we were now crossing which would bring us to our destination. We arrived at the Hmong village about 10:30 PM and finally we were invited to a well earned dinner about 11:30 PM!

The next morning, I explained to them to clear an area in the vicinity of their village where a helicopter could land and bring some rice and household items for the lepers. Later on, rice could be dropped for them by a small one engine plane. They gladly agreed to prepare this clearing for me. So, a couple of weeks later, I was able by helicopter to visit those lepers and bring them rice, medicine and some household items. This area was only about 3 miles away from communist rebels, so when we started dropping rice to the lepers, I went with the pilot so that he would not mistakenly bypass the small leper settlement and then fly into the enemy territory of communist rebels. I had a rope tied to me as I

pushed the 100 lbs bags of rice out of the open door of the Helio. The pilot would bank the plane so it would be easier to push the bags of rice one by one out of the plane and, of course, always relying “on that strong rope tied to my waist”, I never wrote about this to my mother.

After about 4 years (I never kept a diary), these lepers were moved by Father Jean-Marie Ollivier’s leper village in Vang Vieng. The reason for this move was that they were too close to communist rebels and also the difficulty to resupply them so far away from the main supply center at Sam Thong.

I still have one remaining story regarding three Lao women with leprosy, who lived by themselves in the woods about a quarter of a mile from their village which was located in the Sam Neua Province. It was about a 4 hour hike from a group of Hmong refugees at Hong Nong that I used to visit every two or three months. Whenever I brought leprosy medicine for these three Lao women, I would arrive late in the afternoon and sleep in their village. Early in the morning, I would walk to the location of the three women and give each one of them a 6mm supply of anti-leprosy medicine. I would then quickly walk back to Hong Nong and wait for a plane to bring me back to Sam Thong. I started feeling “uneasy” when visiting this Lao village because I heard that some young communist rebels would come and visit their parents in this village every now and then. I tried persuading the three Lao women to go and live in Father Ollivier’s leper village where there were also many other Lao women with leprosy, but they refused because they did not want to move away from their relatives in their home village. Later on, I had to stop visiting them because the enemy was getting too close to their village.

Two years later, I found out from Father Ollivier that those three Lao women with leprosy had finally decided to come and live in his leper village at Vang Vieng. Those women also informed Father Ollivier that the last time I had visited them to bring them medicine, there was a group of communist soldiers hiding close to the trail I was using to bring them medicine. As I walked by those soldiers, one of them aimed at me with his rifle, but another soldier from behind told him not to kill me because I had been coming there to help their three relatives with leprosy and, furthermore, I was not carrying a gun. After those words of advice, the soldier put down his rifle. When I heard this information from Father Ollivier, it kind of scared me finding out suddenly how close to death I had come. Of course, I thank God with all my heart for such a wonderful grace!

In one of my visits to a Khmu village, the father of a family where I usually slept and had my meals, strongly complained to me that a Lao radioman at the adjacent military outpost was planning to marry his daughter in spite of the fact that his daughter was already married to a Khmu soldier who was assigned to a unit far away from their village. General Vang Pao had even told the radioman not to try and marry that Catholic girl who was already married, but that stubborn Lao radioman had decided not to heed the general’s orders. So I told the father of the girl to have that radioman come over and have a talk with me about that planned marriage to his daughter. The village people had recently built me a small hut about 6 X 16 ft adjoining a bamboo walled chapel with a thatched roof. It served as my “office” and lodgings. So, that is where I had my difficult meeting with the Lao radioman who was a Buddhist. I explained to him among other things that the girl was Catholic and that her religion absolutely forbade marrying a second husband if the first one was still alive as was the case of this girl. The father of this girl is also Catholic and does not permit this second marriage to the radioman. In the Lao tradition, you must

have the consent of the parents before a marriage can be celebrated. So I finished by saying that his planned marriage can simply not take place. He didn't say a single word during our meeting and left in anger without any kind of response to what I had said. I found out only later on what he did after going back to his outpost which was only about 200 yards away from my small hut by the chapel. First of all, he drank some alcohol to give himself courage to do what he had in mind. Then, about 9:00 PM in the evening, he took his assault rifle and headed towards my hut. Fortunately, his other Hmong army companions caught him in time and brought him back to their outpost. I have a lot of admiration and gratitude towards those Hmong soldiers who saved my life on that night more than forty years ago.

On another visit of this Khmu village, which was about 4 hours walk from the Thai dam village of Ban Pha where Father Louis Leroy, OMI had been executed by some communist rebels, I was told that the area of Ban Pha had been recently liberated. So the father, who had not wanted the Lao radioman to marry his daughter, volunteered to guide me to the location where Father Leroy had been killed. In order to get there, we had to descend about a 3,000 ft. mountain and then go up about a 4,000 ft. mountain. When we arrived at Ban Pha, we contacted father Leroy's housekeeper, who had heard the rifle shots that had killed father Leroy and then she had secretly gone to his grave site and had laid a piece of wood on it as a marker. So she guided me to that grave site and finally, after digging in the rain, we found the bones of his body that had been buried there about 4 years previously. I found bits of his beard and cincture holding his Oblate Cross. However, his cross was not in his grave. I brought the bits of his beard and cincture back with me and gave it to our bishop in Vientiane, Mgr. Etienne Loosdregt, OMI.

On another visit to some Khmu refugees, with the help of two Khmu catechists as guides, we walked for about 3 or 4 hours to the village where Father Michel Coquelet, OMI had been executed by some communist rebels, in spite of the fact that he had been called to come to that village in order to treat the wound of a communist rebel soldier. The village people told us they had heard the rifle shots that killed Father Coquelet, but they did not know the exact place where he was buried. They could only indicate an approximate area to us, and so we dug in several places but, unfortunately, we were not able to find his body.

On our way back to the Khmu refugee village, we had to cross about an 80 foot wide river with a rapid current. All we had for a bridge was a tree trunk with about only a 10 inch diameter and which stretched from one bank to the other bank of the river. It was about 12 feet high above the river and there was only about 4 inches wide on that round tree trunk that we could use to keep our balance. There was no vine or rope we could hold on to. It was already night time and the beam from my flashlight was becoming dimmer and dimmer. I finished crossing safely with a sigh of relief. Most river crossings in Laos and Borneo were made this way on tree trunks without anything to hold on to. But this one I have just described is really the toughest I ever had to do in my 47 years of missionary life.

About two years before my leaving Laos, Dr. Weldon offered me to use a new six-cylinder jeep that was in his safe-keeping on his property in Vientiane. When he made that offer to me, I told him I was hesitant to use it without the owner's consent who was at that time still living in the U.S. So Dr. Weldon wrote to Bob Ladue, the owner of the jeep, and got the OK for me to use it. Dr. Weldon had offered me

to use the jeep right away because he figured my old friend Bob Ladue would certainly be in favor of my using it.

A jeep had become useful to me because in the 1970's a road had been completed all the way from Vientiane to Long Tieng and Sam Thong, the two main centers resupplying the refugee families and the soldiers. From that main road, some side roads had been constructed in order to communicate with villages not distant from the main road. I was able to make two trips with our bishop, Mgr. Etienne Loosdregt, OMI, who administered the sacrament of Confirmation in the catholic villages we were able to reach by jeep. On my second two week trip with the bishop, I did not at all think that this would also be my last two weeks of visiting refugee villages in Laos, because by the time we drove back to Vientiane, half of the city was in the hands of the communist rebel army. I knew I was a "wanted" man by the communist rebels because I had been visiting "guerrilla" outposts for the past 13 years, so I figured I had better leave as soon as possible. Fortunately, I was able to obtain a visa for Thailand the next morning, and at noon on the 8th of May, 1975, I was able to board a ferry at Tha Deua and crossed the Mekong River to Thailand.

On my way back to the States, I stopped in Palestine and made a 3 day retreat on the Mont of Beatitudes overlooking the beautiful Lake of Gennesaret. I stayed at a hostel managed by some Italian nuns. I could hardly believe I heard correctly when a nun told me that the cost for the food and lodgings was five dollars a day!

Almost two weeks after my arrival in the U.S., I received a letter from Father Daniel Tailley, OMI, who was a teacher at the catechist training school in Vientiane. Whenever I came to Vientiane, I would always stay in the same house as Father Tailley. He informed me in his letter that, on the day I crossed the Mekong River to Thailand, two communist rebel soldiers came to our house in the evening in order to seize me. This was another wonderful grace for my not falling into their hands.

My first dream come true was my obedience to the Oblate Mission in Laos. My second dream come true is when I received the obedience to accompany six other ex-Laos missionaries to Indonesia on the island of Borneo, where a group of Montfort Missionaries were asking for other missionaries to come and help them cover their very large mission area. All travel had to be done either by foot on the jungle trails or by outboard motor on the numerous rivers. There were many Dayak tribes each with their own language, but fortunately, President Sukarno had decreed only one national Bahasa language to be taught in all the schools. As a result, it was understood by the majority of the people, and fortunately, easier to learn compared to the two difficult languages I "grappled" with in Laos.

My six French Oblate companions in Borneo were: Fathers Jacques Chauis, Rene Colin, Andre Hebting, Bernard Keradec, Jean-Pierre Meichel and Jean Subra. We worked as a team; that is, we agreed on basic guidelines on how to conduct our missionary apostolic aims among the Dayak tribes in Borneo. We also agreed to centralize all financial donations with Father Chapuis whom we chose as bursar. If one of us planned an important construction, we would discuss it beforehand in order to get an agreement together. Whenever we helped build a chapel in one of our Christian villages, we would set as a

condition that the villagers had also to help out in constructing the building. On our part, we would furnish the money to buy the gasoline for the chainsaws. We would also pay for the roofing shingles.

Each village had a community leader who would celebrate a para-liturgy on the Sundays there was no priest celebrating Mass. This liturgy consisted of two readings with a short homily and some additional prayers. It went about a half hour long. We had regular annual or bi-annual meetings for the community leaders in order to improve their knowledge in Christian leadership.

In my last parish where I ministered for nine years, I had 22 villages that took me two months to visit on a regular routine. This meant that each village had Mass only once every two months. On the other Sundays, it was the Christian Community leader who called the people for communal prayer.

The crowning point of my 28 years in Borneo was a double celebration in my parish of St. Francis Xavier where I had served for nine years. I had obtained an agreement from my Oblate companions to have a two story parish hall built in order to accommodate youth celebrations in the parish center in the town of Semitau. The first floor was for youth gatherings and the second floor was for lodgings. They just slept side by side on mats. There was a wall in the middle separating the boys' and girls' quarters.

After two years of work, the parish hall was finally finished in time for the inauguration on the 19th of June, 2005, which was two days after my 50th Priesthood Anniversary! The Bishop of the Diocese of Sintang, Mgr. Agustinus Agus, came to bless the parish hall and celebrate Mass with us on my Ordination Anniversary. Five of my Oblate companions concelebrated with me. I left Borneo on the 25th of June, 2005. I was then 76 years old. I had increasing problems with an ailing back that made me decide it was time to go.

As I finish this writing about my experiences in Southeast Asia, I believe this famous saying best reflects my deep felt gratitude towards our loving God: "All is Gift, all is Grace!"