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At top, Sr. Ngan Nguyen, left, and Sr. Mung Nguyen, right, with children at Muong Cat Church in August 2024; the bottom image shows construction of a girls' dormitory by the Lovers of the Holy Cross on March 10 in the Lac Son district of Hoa Binh province of Hanoi, Vietnam. (Top photo courtesy of Sr. Mung Nguyen; bottom photo by Mung Nguyen)



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The Congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi, Vietnam, was established in 1670 by French Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte. The mission of the sisters is to primarily focus on serving women and youth in education, social work, health care, morality and faith. To carry out this mission, the sisters remain committed to tirelessly promoting academic, faith and moral education for children, youth and women, especially in poor and rural areas. Their presence among the poor ethnic Muong communities is evidence of the love and care the sisters share with this population.

Muong Cat Parish is located in the Lac Son district of Hoa Binh province and belongs to the Archdiocese of Hanoi. It is a re-evangelized area of the archdiocese. According to the archdiocese's website, the parish has about 200 parishioners from among an estimated 7,500 families in this area. Missionaries first appeared here in the 1790s, and Muong Cat Parish was established in the early 1900s. After this, the parish was supported by missionaries and native priests who volunteered to serve the community.

According to the archdiocese's website, before 1945 about 95% of people in this community were Catholic. However, the missionaries departed after 1945, and the faith life of people declined. This caused the church to be closed and converted into a community storage facility and meeting rooms.

In 2005, the church was torn down to build a village meeting house for the hamlet, with the parish losing property and personnel. Shortly thereafter, the Catholic community reemerged, and the parish’s activities resulted in the assignment of new pastors beginning in 2018.

Located in a rural mountainous area, the isolated population faces limitations with technology and education; thus, people live in poor conditions, and their income relies on agriculture products they cultivate in nutrient-deficient fields. Children cannot enjoy a good education, and sick and older people struggle to access health care services.

Likewise, because they live far away from the religious institutes of the archdiocese, people lack the spiritual resources that can help them to live a flourishing and moral life. According to Sr. Mung Nguyen, a counselor of the Lovers of the Holy Cross, the lives of the people are materially and spiritually poor, which leads to many problems, such as teenage marriage. Additionally, a lack of education can result in exploitation, human trafficking, drug use and other illicit activities.

Acknowledging the urgent need to help and re-evangelize people in Muong Cat, Hanoi Archbishop Joseph Vu Van Thien invited the sisters of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi to cooperate with the archdiocese in enhancing support resources in 2023. After two years of contributing to education, faith and health care, the sisters have witnessed the difficulties that people face, especially the children.

According to Sr. Nhu Hoa Do, the superior general of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi, it is a challenge for children to go to school because of the mountainous terrain, as children must walk more than six miles from home to school. Although some parents bring their children to school in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon, many parents are busy working in the fields with no time to care for, accompany and teach their children.

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Recognizing the urgency of this matter, the sisters decided to build a dormitory for Catholic and non-Catholic students to remain after their school time. The construction started in early March 2025 and will hopefully be completed by December. Sister Nhu Hoa envisions this dormitory not only as a space for accommodation but also as a good environment for studying where the sisters can guide them and help them grow into responsible individuals.

The sisters will accompany the students and are responsible for encouraging them to study for higher education as a path to escape poverty, integrate into society, and reduce the likelihood of early marriage or falling into the traps of social evils.

The purpose of the dormitory is to educate girls to become mature and productive in society and the church. The sisters plan to receive 100 students from elementary to high school for daycare, prioritizing poorer students who would otherwise lose the opportunity to study. The sisters will also receive about 50 students who will reside

there. The sisters hope to build a dormitory for boys in the future.

Along with the dormitory, the sisters will build a clinic to provide basic health care for local people. The clinic will receive anyone who cannot afford treatment during the day and will have rooms and other accommodation for patients who must stay longer. The clinic will have about 30 rooms and support up to 60 patients.

The cost for this project is funded by donors in Vietnam and elsewhere who love the poor and want to cooperate with the sisters to relieve human suffering. The funding for the project is almost enough, but the long-term finances required to sustain this project remain uncertain. However, through this project, the sisters have continued to demonstrate their faith and trust in God. When asked where they could get the funding for food, medicine and tools to maintain and run this project, they responded like Abraham and said, "God would provide."

Trusting in God's love and providence, the sisters believe that God will help them, accompany them and send people to support them. May God bless the sisters' holy plans to care for God's people. May God send more benefactors to help the sisters fulfill their mission to help educate people in poverty to fulfill their potential and help the church and society.