

By Fr. Pierre Nguyen, novice-master

Some 40 miles east of Saigon (Vietnam) the Assumptionist novitiate has opened "Compassion Restaurant" for children of poor day laborers often left to their devices while their parents are at work.

The Assumptionist novitiate of Ba Ria is located in the parish of Lang Cat some 40 miles east of Saigon. While the life of the novitiate places an especial emphasis on interiority, that does not mean that it is entirely closed in on itself. The novitiate maintains friendly relations with local parishioners who are happy with our presence among them. We are involved in any number of activities -- religion classes for children, visits to the sick and shut-ins, work with young people considering a vocation, marriage preparation, etc.

We have likewise just opened a 'restaurant' we call Compassion Place ('a restaurant of the heart'). In the footsteps of our founder, Fr. d'Alzon, who was actively involved with the poor of his hometown, Nimes, we have been touched by the plight of many of our neighbors and have tried to find ways to be with them so that they do not feel abandoned by society. The motto of our new project is "Give them something to eat yourselves" (Mt 14:16). This word of Jesus to his disciples with regard to the crowd who had followed him and had brought nothing to eat with them in the wilderness is our source of inspiration.

The beneficiaries of our little restaurant are children of poor families. Their parents are laborers who work in the neighboring factories. Their work is precarious, without the benefit of contracts, and their miserable salaries are determined by middlemen working with employers to provide them with a work-force; in exchange, employers allow them to fix salaries in their place (leaving plenty of room for abuse). The children of these families are left on their own during the day, and sometimes at night, because their parents must work long hours.



Assumptionists and volunteers working at "Compassion" Restaurant

We work with a network of volunteers and benefactors. For now, only brunch is served between 9-11 AM. Br. Francis Xavier Phan Van Duong is the prime mover and shaker while the novitiate community provides supervisors for the operation. Lay friends take their turns cooking two or three days a week, setting tables and serving meals, and doing “K.P.” duty



Br. Francis Xavier