

"Not all of us do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Need Helping Hands

The images and lives of lepers in the Central Highlands have made a big impression on our hearts. Any pain cannot be compared to the pain of a leper: physical pain and spiritual suffering. Disease leads to poverty, and poverty leads to disease. That vicious circle goes on forever and clings to them until they leave the world.

Although they have recovered from their illness, they still suffer pain, inferiority because of their disability, helplessness to make a living, and are isolated and scared by society.

Leprosy also leaves serious damage on the body: nasal collapse, unclosed eyes, loss of corneal reflexes, bone shrinkage, and finger and toe amputation. Ulcer wounds on the hands or feet are called "*chronic ulcers*." Chronic ulcer wounds keep digging deeply into flesh to bone.

The longer it takes, the more it causes necrosis, causing sore skin and extreme pain. But hands must work to earn a living, which makes treatment of chronic ulcers difficult and a nightmare for leprosy patients.

The only treatment is to soak their hands and feet, wash their wounds every day, and give them special sandals. As such, it's essential we create a sandal workshop for leprosy patients in Kon Tum diocese, Vietnam, serving Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces.

Creating a pair of sandals for leprosy patients takes a lot of work. A technician must meet the patients and cast their feet, bring powder molds to the workshop to dry, and pour plaster into powder molds to create the patient's feet form.

Each patient has a different leg pattern: Sometimes the right foot is round, but the left one is distorted. Sometimes the right foot is big, but the left one is small. Oh my God! There are all kinds of feet size and form.

The materials for making sandals are also special: The foam base is soft so that the patients do not experience pain when walking. Conversely, because leprosy patients' feet no longer feel when they are stabbed by a sharp object, soles must be very hard and light.

In the past, in the Central Highlands, with the purpose of alleviating spiritual and material pains of the lepers, Friends of the Lepers Association has implemented many programs: helping with food, providing scholarships for students, making sandals for disabled patients, and supplying medicine. During their visits, the Association do not hesitate to look at every single chronic ulcer on the patients' feet. One image that stuck deeply in our minds included handshakes between ten-full-finger hands of Association members and fingerless hands of many leprosy patients.

The Association's capacity is limited while the needs of poor leprosy patients are too big and too much. The lepers in Vietnam need your kindness and sharing hearts. We really need more loving hands, together with the Association, helping lepers so that they can have opportunities to escape from dark miserable lives and to live one worthy of a human being and as children of God. We hope you will join us, with the Association, to give poor lepers in our homeland hope and better futures for their children. ***They deserve your mercy.***

May our Lord bless you!

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The Sandal Workshop for Leprosy Patients

Diocese of KonTum