

# Chuck & Heidi Hanson: Foundation for Children of Vietnam



**You recently spent some time in Vietnam as part of an extended vacation in Asia. Tell us a little about what you were doing there.** We were fortunate to be able to accompany a team of people, led by former BUMC member Phuong Bui, to help distribute bicycles to children from poor families across Vietnam. This project is sponsored by the Foundation for Children of Vietnam (FCVN), which was founded in 1998 by Phuong's mother, a Vietnamese refugee who fled the war-torn country in 1975 with her husband and their four children. The goal of the Foundation is to help combat childhood illiteracy and promote education in Vietnam. With her mother's tragic passing in 2000, Phuong was determined to carry on the work of the Foundation. The biggest program of the Foundation is to gift bicycles to extremely poor and many minority children, who often live miles from school and must walk hours each day, to help them reach school and continue their education. When Phuong asked us if we would be interested in joining the most recent mission trip in March, we jumped at the opportunity! We have donated to the Foundation for the past several years and were interested to see, first hand, the impact the bicycles made on children's lives. During this recent trip, the Foundation distributed a total of 1,300 bicycles — the most ever — in over 50 towns across Vietnam thanks to generous donations from corporations and individuals, which include many BUMC members. We agree with former BUMC pastor Rev. Ron Foster, who accompanied Phuong on a 2014 mission, that the experience was truly "unforgettable."

**What was the most surprising or unexpected thing that you experienced/noticed while delivering bikes and meeting the children?** Wow, we experienced so many things during our trip that it is difficult to say what stood out as the most surprising or unexpected. One thing we noticed was how disciplined and well behaved the children are. We would show up at a school to distribute the bikes, and they would generally be in the school courtyard sitting patiently on their small stools waiting for us to arrive. As we looked around, we were always struck by how beautiful the children are and what lively and wonderful spirits they possess, despite the extreme poverty in which they live – Phuong says they are so poor they do not know how poor they are! When it came time to gift the bicycles, we were surprised to learn that the children generally had never received any kind of gift before, let alone a new bicycle that has substantial value to a poor family in Vietnam! We can become comfortable with our lives in Bethesda, so it is important to remind ourselves of the needs of others in the world and how those needs should not surprise us but move us to action.

**How did this experience impact your faith life?** Seeing the happy faces of the children when they received their bicycle and watching them ride off was a truly priceless experience and one that made us feel that God was present in that moment! It surely strengthened our belief that such action is right and consistent with God's calling, and it reminded us of Jesus's teachings about the importance of helping those who do not have the means to help themselves, and to love and support others as God would want us to do. We saw first-hand that a small action such as gifting of bicycles can have a large impact on people's lives, and in a broader perspective, perhaps help heal a part of this world that has been so severely impacted by years of conflict, death and destruction.

**What, for you, is the significance of being in relationship with people around the globe? How do you see that as part of our ministry as Christians located in Bethesda, Maryland?** During her German upbringing, Heidi was exposed to people from a variety of nations around the world and she has always relished these "international" relationships as a necessary component to solving the world's toughest problems and making it a better place. Her desire to work in a global setting led her to a nearly 30-year career at the World Bank. Indeed, this global perspective is something we both share, and we have developed deep friendships with people from different backgrounds and faiths, many of whom we think hold Christian values even though they were not raised in the Christian faith. So as you may gather, we both love to travel, experience different cultures and meet new people. One of our favorite quotes is this by Mark Twain, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts." We feel that it is part of our ministry to help break down barriers between people from all areas of the globe and to show that we value diversity.

**What do you want the people of BUMC to know about this project and how they can support future endeavors?** If you were at BUMC in 2013, you may recall that the Christmas Eve offering was donated to the Foundation for the bicycle project. Since then, this project has grown steadily, with many BUMC members continuing to support it during its annual fund-raising efforts. For those who have previously supported the Foundation and those who have not heard about it, we would like you to know that it is alive and well and continuing to grow - even if Phuong is no longer in the area - with the need for assistance as great as ever. We hope you will consider supporting it in the future! Any (tax-deductible) donation is welcomed and we encourage you to ask us (Chuck - [cascade240@aol.com](mailto:cascade240@aol.com), or Heidi - [hfh536@gmail.com](mailto:hfh536@gmail.com)) for more information, or to donate directly through the Foundation's website ([www.childrenvietnam.org](http://www.childrenvietnam.org)).

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