

## Lunar New Year celebration for people living with HIV in Vietnam

Attendees at the church-run event received the love and support they lack in everyday lives Lunar New Year celebration for people living with HIV in Vietnam



Hundreds of people living with HIV have enjoyed friendship and gifts at a new year fair held by Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese.

Some 500 people living with HIV and their children attended a special fair for Tet, the Vietnamese new year in the compound of Dong Tien Church on Jan. 21. Archbishop Paul Bui Van Doc of Ho Chi Minh City also visited and gave his best wishes to attendees.

Many received tokens to play traditional games and food and gifts at the fair that was staffed by volunteers including scouts, seminarians, nuns and priests.

"I now have food for Tet," said Hoa, who did not want to give his last name. He received rice, instant noodles, cake, soap, milk, sugar and clothes.

"These things are more than what I expected. I am pleased because I have no money to buy them," said Hoa, who earns 50,000 dong (US\$2.2) a day carrying goods at a bus station. He also sleeps there.

Hoa said that, if it wasn't for the fair, then he and his friends would have nothing to celebrate during this most important festival, held from Jan. 28 to Feb. 1.

"I'm grateful to the Catholic workers who welcomed me and gave me medicine and care when my siblings abandoned me," Hoa said.

Father Paul Nguyen Nhu Hieu, an organizer, said that the fair helped to bring mercy, sympathy and materials to marginalized people living with HIV. Tet is an opportunity to share humanity and solidarity with others.

Attendees received gifts costing 600,000 dong and a further 50,000 dong, paid for by benefactors interested in the event, said Father Hieu.

The city is home to 24,000 people living with HIV. Some 30 percent have no personal papers so they cannot get medicine and medical care from organizations and public hospitals. Most face discrimination, poverty and do manual jobs like selling lottery tickets, polishing shoes, and guarding shops, Father Hieu added.

Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc ordered cities and provinces throughout the country not to set off fireworks at new year parties and instead to save money and give food to poor people.

So far, 15 provinces offered 17,000 tonnes of rice to poor people to help them celebrate the festival.

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