

# Office Memorandum *International Voluntary Services*. INC.

TO : CHI RHO Members, Christian Church, Kingman, Kansas 17 JAN 67

FROM : Larry Woodson, IVS/EDUC-ACOP/Field, Vientiane, Laos.

SUBJECT: Pencils.

I am very happy to convey the thanks from the recipients of the pencils, which you sent. I gave the pencils to students in grades 4,5, and 6. I felt that they would get the best use in these grades and would be appreciated the most.

I think you should be proud of the fact that you have shown true Christmas Spirit in giving gifts like this to children in underdeveloped countries, who do not have the same advantages, such as a good education.

To give you an idea of what life is like for a student in Laos, I would like to cite some information from the Director of Primary and Adult Education here in Laos.

"In the rural sectors, not many children go to school. Laotian parents use them as labor to work in the fields or to do the housekeeping. Their way of life is so that they have to keep at home, at least, one of every three children. Though education in Laos is free of charge, the farmers still think that to send their children to school, cost them some expense. The children must be dressed properly; at home in the country-side they are almost naked. They must feed them or prepare their meals at regular hours. But when the children stay at home, they go fishing, help their parents and eat late.

During the harvest of December and January, their attendance at school is very low. Very often parents send their children to school in two groups: with five children they have they will send three of them for about three or four years so the children can write and read Laotian, then they leave school and the other two go. A child at home works for the family. But, when he is at school, he will not have opportunity to work for the family and his efforts are wasted. This attitude still exists in the far-away sectors and the mountains where there are not many roads.

Even though many of the children are kept at home, there are many classrooms in Laos with one-hundred students and only one teacher. Many of these schools consist of bamboo walls and tin roofs. They are hot and dirty in the dry season and cold and dark in the rainy and cold seasons.

Of 39,789 students who were in grade one in 1956, only 5,277 reached grade six or a drop-out rate of 85%. From 1960 to 1965, the drop-out rate was 80%. This drop-out rate is true for many countries in Asia as well as developing countries throughout the world."

Health is another problem here in Laos and modern medicine is not very well developed in the rural areas. Medical consultation does not exist in the school. The infantile mortality rate is still high, 35 per 1000 in one year. Using this percentage against the number of students in grade one in 1956, we can assume that almost 1,400 children died.

I hope that you have found some of the above information as interesting and challenging as I did. For those of you who go on to become teachers, doctors, community development leaders, I think there will be a need for your services in all of the underdeveloped and emerging countries in the world.

Do not take lightly your religious training, because it will help you maintain the proper perspective in times of stress which you will find overseas, as well as any place, throughout your life.

Thank you again for the pencils and may all of you have a prosperous New Year. God Bless you all.

Sincerely,

*Larry Woodson*  
Larry Woodson