

17 Oct. 1997

To the Steering Committee of FoVNH:

Dear Pat, John, Hilary, Susan, Marie Therese, Leon & Bill,

Firstly, I wish to apologize for my lack of communication over the last several months, including a past-due issue of the FoVNH Newsletter that hasn't even been started yet. As some of you know this last summer we began building a new home in the mountains near here, a process with which I've been rather intimately involved since its inception. I've pretty much managed to use this as an excuse for not getting anything else accomplished during that time.

But with a small amount of reflection I find I can't honestly use this plea in regards to not getting the newsletter out. The truth is, I don't have anything to say. I have no news with which to make a newsletter. This state of affairs promotes more reflection.

It's not to say things haven't been happening. I appreciate and applaud the activities of those of you who continue exploring the various avenues of possible assistance to our friends of the VN Highlands. I suppose it's just that, to be concise, I must say I think it's time we start doing what we came to do, or we get off the pot.

Two years have passed since our reunion and decision to try to provide some assistance to those we felt to be in need around the Kontum area: friends, some children and grandchildren of friends. Three years have passed since we began these communications. I agree with those who argue that we need to examine our goals, our potential impact, the avenues we intend using to achieve those goals. On the other hand, I believe this should be an on-going process. In reality I think we all realize our impact will be modest (more to the point: small) and that, aside from political considerations, the needs of our intended recipients have in general not changed that much over the last quarter century (health care, clean water, economic self-sufficiency). Even the political considerations [i.e. who's in charge, whose toes we're stepping on, where are we likely to get into trouble, and more importantly, who else might we get in trouble by our actions] are not all that different from what we dealt with those many years ago. Regimes and names have changed, but the cultural, social, and political agendas are not unfamiliar.

A number of friends had sent monies to me in the early days of the formation of FoVNH asking me to use them as I saw fit. These funds I forwarded to the coffers of FoVNH. I'm somewhat embarrassed at this point to tell these same friends that two years later their dollars are still sitting in a U.S. bank and the intended recipients are still in need.

In retrospect I see a large part of the problem (in a lack of decisions made) stemming from our initial desire to remain informal, thus electing no "officers" of FoVNH. I don't think anyone wants to step on anyone else's toes and assume the authority we so sorely need.

I believe we've passed the point of a need for informality. We need organization and decisions to be made. Now.

I have several suggestions:

1) The steering committee immediately nominate and elect, at the minimum, an (acting) director of the steering committee of FoVNH; a person with the power to make decisions for the committee specifically and FoVNH in general, as well as the power to dispense funds. At the same time offices of treasurer and secretary could be elected among yourselves. All this is perfectly proper, since we don't officially exist anyway.

2) At the last count that I saw we had something just less than \$1000 in FoVNH accounts. As a sign of good faith (in several senses of the phrase) I recommend that those funds, in their entirety, be allotted to the charge of Bill Rose, who I understand will be traveling to Kontum shortly, with instructions that those funds be divided between Father Lien and Ya Gabrielle for their respective projects affecting the poorer citizens of that area. We ask for a simple accounting of those funds for our own use.

3) Should the committee (or better, director) find the above suggestion unreasonable for some reason then the funds might be passed to (and through) the Pleiku Trust, designated for the same purposes.

4) A person or committee be selected to draw up a very brief set of by-laws for FoVNH (at least temporary - see item #6) with a time frame established for its completion and for its acceptance or rejection by vote of the members of FoVNH (see #5).

5) The steering committee establish plans for a vote of officers and bylaws by the general membership within a period of six months maximum.

6) Director (and/or subcommittee) set mechanisms in order to achieve 501(c)3 status (doesn't anyone know a lawyer who would donate a few hours to do this? A lawyer might suggest what's necessary in the way of by-laws).

[NOTE: Advisability of this item might still be debated. From last year's questionnaire members seemed to state that tax-exempt status would be nice but not really necessary for our paltry contributions - on the other hand maybe we could get non-paltry donations with 501(c)3 status... the question is: do we want them? The point is that this item needs to be pursued.]

7) When most of the above items have been taken care of the director can notify the editor of the FoVNH Newsletter (if he hasn't been fired by this time) of the progress that has been made, hopefully in a publishable form, so that a real newsletter can finally be put out. [I think this is called a hostage situation.]

With a little further rumination I might come up with more suggestions, but I think these sufficient for the time being.

In regards to item #2 and the dispensing of FoVNH funds in their entirety, and to answer your question - I'll pay for the next newsletter (and I imagine there are those who will join me). I just feel that we need to get what we have ... out! We can tell the membership that the funds are being used for their intended purposes and if we wish to continue we start all over again collecting money... an act of faith.

I've had these last several months to ruminate on all this (physical labor is good for such rumination) and feel strongly about the above suggestions. I submit them with the greatest amount of respect for all of you and in the knowledge that we're all striving for what's best. I just think it's past time to act.

In friendship and sincerity,


Kerry