News



Sr. Anna Nguyen Thi Hien (third from left), another sister and lay volunteers offer flowers to Venerable Thich Tam Quang, a Buddhist monk and clinic director, at Hai Duc Clinic on May 6. The sisters were responding to the archbishop's call to reach out to Buddhists in Vietnam who were hampered from celebrating Buddha's birth and enlightenment due to the pandemic. (Joachim Pham)

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Sisters in central Vietnam have responded to the local church's call for showing harmony and unity with Buddhists who celebrated the Vesak festival last week to honor Buddha's birth and enlightenment.

On May 6, Archbishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh of the Hue Archdiocese, who celebrated an online Mass due to the COVID-19 pandemic, called on local Catholics to pay special attention to their Buddhist friends and neighbors who have also been hit by the effects of the coronavirus outbreak.

Linh, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, said the Vesak festival was an opportunity for local Catholics to visit nearby pagodas and their Buddhist friends, build solidarity and friendship with Buddhist followers, and express gratitude to those who have made contributions to the nation.

The ancient city of Hue is home to Buddhism in Southern Vietnam.

Buddhists celebrated the Vesak festival commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of Gautama Buddha in Theravada Buddhism on the 15th day of the fourth lunar month, which fell on May 7 this year.

After the Mass, he and six priests and two nuns paid visits and offered flowers and good wishes to the Buddhist Sangha Executive Committee based in Thua Thien Hue. They visited Tu Hieu Pagoda, where the well-known Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is spending the rest of his life. Hanh, 93, co-founded Plum Village Monastery in France in 1982.



Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception bring flowers and cakes wrapped in yellow paper to visit Hai Duc Pagoda in Hue City on May 6, the day before the Vesak festival to celebrate the birth of Buddha. (Joachim Pham)

Responding to Linh's call and visits, Daughter of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Sr. Anna Nguyen Thi Hien, other sisters and lay volunteers visited two other pagodas and offered cakes wrapped in yellow paper and bouquets of flowers.

Hien, who heads Kim Long Charity Clinic, gave warm congratulations and peace to Venerable Thich Tam Quang, a Buddhist monk who directs the Hai Duc Clinic run by

Hai Duc Pagoda, his staff and volunteers.

"We wish to maintain the solidarity between the two sides in the future," the sister told Buddhist hosts. Both sides have cooperated with one another in providing free herbal medicine and health care to poor patients for the last 20 years.

Hien regretted that her congregation had to cancel a national conference this month on the roles of dignitaries and religious volunteers in providing material and emotional support for vulnerable people. The event was canceled due to the country's social distancing rule to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sr. Lucia Le Thi Hang, member of the congregation's charity committee, said the nuns offered free rice to 300 Buddhist families who have been badly hit by the pandemic. Ten nuns and volunteers served meals to those who have returned from other places and were in quarantine at a center in Thua Thien Hue Province.

Tam Quang said he was glad to receive the Catholic nuns and volunteers who visited and extended joy and good wishes to the clinic.

He said he appreciated the active mutual cooperation of the followers of the two religions in serving people with HIV/AIDS and holding funerals for the dead.

"We aim to help people in need to live in peace. We look after HIV patients, teach people how to practice yoga and meditation, educate farmers on how to respond to the climate change, and take part in environmental protection," he said.

He said Buddhists canceled Vesak celebrations due to the pandemic. His clinic had no gifts to give poor people on the festival day as it received few donations from benefactors. The clinic offers herbal medicine and acupuncture to 160 patients each day.

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The nuns also visited Most Venerable Thich Tue Tam, a famous expert in herbal medicine who manages Lien Hoa Pagoda in Hue.

Tue Tam teaches Catholic sisters how to perform acupuncture and use herbal medicine to treat patients.

"Although we have different faiths, we share the same mission that is to serve other people selflessly, and bring compassion and charity to the most vulnerable members of our society," he said.

Tue Tam said he is a partner of Kim Long Charity Clinic and works with sisters to treat patients.

He said he faces difficulties in planting herbs in a 5,000-square-meter area because his benefactors have encountered legal snags in funding the project.

Hien told Tue Tam that the sisters would pray for his project to be successful.

She also said that her clinic is under reconstruction and will be completed in 2021. She is pleased that a Buddhist architect designed the new building.

Thich Nu Thu Minh, a Buddhist nun from Tay Linh Pagoda, said the Buddhist Sangha Executive Committee in Thua Thien Hue contributed 350 million dong ($15,000) in food and funds to 1,000 families who have lost jobs and now lack food in the pandemic.

Sr. Teresa Nguyen Thi Kim Lan from the Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation said she and four other sisters also visited and gave a bouquet of roses and good wishes to Phu Hau Pagoda and a Buddhist monastery near her congregation in Hue.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for Global Sisters Report based in Vietnam.]