



CHRISTMAS 2023

Dear godmothers, godfathers and friends of Le Sourire,

Since a few months, we have been able again to visit the villages of the mountain tribes in order to renew our relationship with the local people. The coronavirus epidemic had temporarily weakened this relationship, and travel to other districts was strictly forbidden and severely punished. Schools have now reopened and are operating at a more or less normal pace.

A few months ago, we were contacted by a woman from the Lahu tribe who had decided to leave her hidden hamlet to live closer to the Thai population, leaving behind her daughter, her son-in-law and their five children. The young family lives in poverty on the meagre harvests of rice and maize and the various plants that nature provides. There is no schooling for the children.

In her distress, the grandmother asked for our help and we decided to receive three of the children, aged 6, 8 and 10. The youngest attends nursery school, while the other two are in the same class at primary school. This was an arduous apprenticeship for the three boys, who had never left their modest surroundings and obviously only spoke their mother tongue. Once again, our youngsters showed their brotherly understanding and the boys' smiles reassured us.

The Lahus, the smallest of Thailand's 20 ethnic groups, live in the forested mountains in the north of the country. Originally from Tibet, they settled in China and later in Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. Legendary hunters, they are also known for their basketry and extraordinary weaving. Often animists, sometimes christians, they believe in the equality of the sexes, marriage being an essential step - "chopsticks only work in pairs" as the Lahu proverb goes!

That said, poverty in the north of the country has increased drastically in recent years. The cost of living has soared, unemployment has increased significantly and the health crisis has pushed a large number of people into precarious situations. As far as possible, we therefore try also to offer our help to the Thai population of the surrounding villages.

New challenges lie ahead. Enriched by the experience of the past, constantly challenged by young people who are searching, hoping and often dreaming, we continue on our way, whatever the cost!

Without you, dear godmothers, godfathers and friends, Le Sourire would not exist - thanks to your unfailing support and trust, we will continue. We wish you a Merry Christmas and 366 days of light and peace in 2024.

Barbara *Prapapone*