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by Sofie Van Zeebroeck

In July 2005, 19 leaders of KSJ-KSA-VKSJ (Young Catholic Students) Belgium took part in an exposure program in South of Vietnam. A big part of the exposure was organised with TSC (Thang/Young (Sinh/Students) (Công/Catholic) Vietnam, a member of IYCS.



KSJ Belgium Photo

On 3 July they welcomed us with flowers at the Ho Chi Minh City airport. After months of planning and preparation we were all very excited to finally meet each other! Our first contact was already warm and spontaneous. At the dinner party that evening it was wonderful to see every Belgian student speaking with a Vietnamese friend.

The next day we spent recovering from the long journey. We also visited a school for street children. One of our members had already worked there as a volunteer for nine months.

The program the following day with some dynamics to get to know each other and the opening mass. We liked the Vietnamese girls' singing and the T-shirts and caps that they made for us using the logo we had made for the exchange. Afterwards we talked about our own expectations. That night we experienced Ho Chi Minh City's the crazy traffic from the back of a motorbike. Scary, but exciting!

Soon we discovered that we had a lot in common: we like to laugh, sing, dance, play and joke with each other. And we were all very curious about the other. There were some surprising differences between us. Vietnamese people don't kiss each other when they meet, something very common in Belgium. On the other hand, the Vietnamese boys were very close to each other, something that Belgian boys aren't used to. Despite these small differences, we got along well.

We spent 5 days fixing up a school in Ben Tre, a poor province in the Mekong delta. The Vietnamese people said we worked hard and quickly, and that we were very strong. The communication between us wasn't always easy and there were few tools to work with, but together we managed to do all that had to be done. Each night we shared an activity: a game or quiz to learn about each others' countries, a discussion about our differences, a karaoke night! It was amazing how much enthusiasm our TSC friends showed in these activities. We all had a lot of fun.

Back in the city, some of our friends showed us cultural sites: the Cu Chi tunnels (used by the Vietcong in the American war), some temples and a history museum. It was very interesting for Belgian students and also for those Vietnamese who hadn't been there yet. They also took us to the market for souvenir shopping and helped us to bargaining.



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On our last day together we played a discussion game about sustainable development. We talked about waste management, drugs, education.... Our conclusion was that most of the time there isn't the money in Vietnam for good investments, although they are

aware of the problems. It is still an economically poor country.

We said goodbye on the last night at a very nice coffee shop. We wrote messages for each other and some tears were shed. This was the proof that it had been an important experience for us all. We hope to see each other again, and will do our best to organise a program for our Vietnamese friends in Belgium next summer.

If you want to know more about the exchange project, you can contact Sofie Van Zeebroeck,



KSJ-KSA-VKSJ Belgium

**Sofie@ksj.org**

Telephone: 0032 (0)2 201 15 10

More info and pictures:

**<http://exchange.ksj.org>**

About the exchange and TSC Vietnam:

**<http://www.iycs-jeci.org/exchange.htm>**