

Mission to Vietnam

By Don Turbitt



Don and Fr. Frank with newly ordained Fr. Hoan Nguyen.

FR. FRANK SANTILLI and I traveled to the diocese of Phat Diem where Bishop Joseph Nguyen Nang made last minute arrangements for us to teach a week-long bible study to 100 sisters of The Lovers of the Cross.

Fr. Frank taught on the Gospel of Luke while I followed with teachings from the Acts of the Apostles. After a few days the superior asked Fr. Frank if he could teach from John's Gospel and the new encyclical by Pope Francis, and I continued to teach from Acts. I believe the sisters were very happy with the week of teaching. There was an older sister who told me her very interesting story through a translator. During the Vietnam War when she was younger, there were three different times when she intended to go to a church or a house and she sensed something in her spirit saying, "Don't go today," so she stayed home. Each time, a bomb dropped on the place she was supposed to go. Like a child she asked me, "Do you think that was a miracle?" Just being able to tell her that she was truly hearing God gave me great joy.

We built a solid relationship with Bishop Joseph Nguyen Nang and his director of pastoral activities. Each day we joined the bishop and three other priests for meals. A year ago the bishop visited St. Philip's Parish in Providence and is very interested in building on that relationship. Our home parish has benefited from two seminarians from Phat Diem and the bishop has benefited by our support of 25 seminarians each year for the past four years. Presently, the bishop would like to partner with Renewal Ministries and People of God's Love to have seminarians come to the U.S. for major seminary training. After they graduate two of them would

return to Phat Diem and commit to the bishop who sponsored them.

A bonus surprise was to find out that the Phat Diem Diocese and others in Vietnam have Men of St. Joseph men's groups in place. We now have nine or ten countries involved in MOSJ! I am excited and praying that God will start sending more men so that we can continue to move forward.

While we were there Bishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh ordained two priests in his diocese. One of the two was Fr. Hoan Nguyen, the brother of Hiep Nguyen, our Providence seminarian. The Catholic Church in Vietnam may be poor but it definitely knows how to celebrate. Mass was concelebrated by 50 priests with nearly 2,000 people attending. After Mass each family had 20 guests invited to lunch with the bishop along with the 50 priests, Fr. Frank and myself.

I am very happy to be part of supporting 60 seminarians each year; I am hoping to expand these numbers. I am not sure how many more years we will be able to support a seminarian for \$1 a day! Vietnam has educated some very courageous priests, especially a 95-year old who concelebrates Mass every day in the bishop's chapel. He also spent 16 years in prison for being a Catholic priest. Our last few days in Phat Diem were spent building a relationship with the rector of the seminary whom we are acquainted with from our past visits. He should be coming to the U.S. in a year and will visit St. Philip's Parish. +



Each day for a week, Don taught on the Acts of the Apostles to 100 religious sisters from The Lovers of the Cross order.