



Deacon  
Chau Doan

# SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN VIETNAM

The Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, recently ordained Rev. Paul Hiep Nguyen to the priesthood and Seminarian Doan Nguyen to the diaconate, with his ordination to the priesthood planned for this June. As Country Coordinator Don Turbitt explained, neither of these ordinations would have been possible without the help of Renewal Ministries' supporters.

Both Fr. Paul Hiep and Deacon Doan came to the US from Vietnam in 2011, at the invitation of Bishop Thomas Tobin. Don had shared with Bishop Tobin that a bishop in Vietnam was open to sharing a couple seminarians with the Providence Diocese, and Bishop Tobin instructed Fr. Frank Santilli to extend the invitation during his time on mission with Don. When Fr. Paul Hiep and Deacon Doan first came to the US, they had to learn to speak more fluent English, so it took two years before they re-entered seminary training.

Don recently expressed his gratitude for "so much good (that) has happened over the last twelve years" of his missions in Vietnam. He wrote, "Because Renewal Ministries sent me out on missions, Deacon Chau of Michigan (also a Renewal Ministries' Country Coordinator) took me to Vietnam, and Fr. Frank Santilli took the main responsibility for two wonderful seminarians, by God's grace, my mission work has helped to produce one (and soon to be two) Catholic priests."

On these two pages, we share both Don and Deacon Doan's reflections on the tremendous blessing of Fr. Paul Hiep and Deacon Doan's "yes" to follow God's call to a new land.

## REFLECTION FROM DON TURBITT

I didn't know how much parents must do for their sons before they are ordained priests. Our Providence Diocese paid for their education, thank God. But Fr. Frank has been and continues to be the spiritual father of these exceptionally fine young men. He is not just their advisor, which is a huge responsibility, but he also cares for all their needs—physical, emotional, and spiritual. All I can take credit for is teaching them how to drive. In Vietnam, everyone drives a motor bike, not many drive a car.

Fr. Hiep and Deacon Doan call my wife and I "Grampy" and "Nana." We have thirteen blood grandchildren and these two spiritual grandchildren. How humbled we are to be part of their holy lives!

Vietnam has left a deep mark on my soul. I love the people I have met there and the spiritual life I experienced with them. I was very blessed to do the first reading at Fr. Hiep's ordination Mass. The second reading was in Vietnamese. Hiep's brother is a priest in Vietnam and had hundreds of people from his parish watch the ordination Mass on Skype. The next Sunday, Fr. Hiep celebrated his first Mass at our parish, St. Philip Church, which he and Deacon Doan have called home for the past nine years. Fr. Frank has done everything for these two great men, but I am still a humbled grandfather with a deep sense of fulfillment in my mission work.

*The following interview took place between Renewal Ministries' Editor Heather Schultz and Deacon Doan.*

**Q: Please tell me about your call to the priesthood.**

**A:** God calls each person to follow Him in different ways. God revealed my vocation to me in different events of my life, through different people I have met, and especially through prayer. Prayer is the best way through which I have discerned my vocation.

I would like to tell you about one event that happened in my discernment to the priesthood. During Father Frank's visit at my seminary in Vietnam, one day when I was standing at the hallway of the seminary, Fr. Frank approached me and said, "The Holy Spirit moved me to talk with you." He explained that when he had been sleeping, the Holy Spirit woke him up and told him that a seminarian needed his help, but at that time, Fr. Frank did not know who the seminarian was. Fr. Frank got up and prayed, and at the morning Mass, Fr. Frank recognized that the seminarian was me. After several talks, Fr. Frank asked me if I wanted to become a priest for Providence. I told him it was impossible, but Fr. Frank told me if God wanted it, nothing was impossible. He told me to trust in God's plan for me.

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**Q: How did you come to study and eventually be ordained in America?**

**A:** In early November of 2011, Fr. Frank and Don travelled to Rome for a meeting. They invited me to go with them and then go to the US. We spent a week visiting historical places near Rome before leaving for the US. It was the first time I had been away from Vietnam.

I stayed at St. Philip Parish, where Fr. Frank is the pastor and Mr. Don Turbitt is a parishioner, for three months. In February, I returned to Vietnam. During the visit, Fr. Frank and I discussed whether I wanted to study for the Diocese of Providence. After praying and consulting my spiritual director and my formation advisor, I decided to accept the invitation. In August of 2012, Fr. Paul Hiep and I returned to the US as seminarian students for the Diocese of Providence.

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**Q: Please share some of the struggles and blessings of your transition to a new country and culture.**

**A:** Moving to a new place with different culture, customs, and language is not easy. First, I struggled with missing my family and friends. This made me very lonely. However, it happened only for a short time. When the school year began, I was very busy studying. This helped me feel better. Moreover, I have received great support, both physically and spiritually, from the Diocese of Providence, from the bishop, from priests and brother seminarians, and especially from Fr. Frank and Don and Pat Turbitt. I do not have my blood family here, but I have a very wonderful and great family, the Diocese of Providence. They are blessings for me. The time goes by fast, and I am grateful for all I have now. The Diocese of Providence and the people here are great gifts from God, for which I am always thankful.

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**Q: How have Don Turbitt and Fr. Frank helped support you?**

**A:** No word can express enough how great their support of me is. They have supported me both physically and spiritually. They have bought me clothes, shoes, school supplies, etc. They always care for what I eat, where I stay, and how I live in a new country far away from my home. Whenever they see me, they often ask if I need anything. They celebrate different events with me, for example my traditional Vietnamese Tet New Year or my birthday. They pray for

me always, and even more, they ask their friends to pray for me. They are my new family here: in my heart and mind, Fr. Frank is my Dad, and Don and Pat Turbitt are my grandparents.

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**Q: What were your thoughts as your ordination to the diaconate was approaching?**

**A:** The diaconate is the first step in the Holy Orders for me to approach to the priesthood. It is God's unconditional love for me. I am not worthy, but out of love for me, God chooses me and makes me his instrument for his work of salvation. My vocational priesthood is a great and unconditional love of God for me.

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**Q: What is it like to serve in a different country?**

**A:** In the past, it was difficult because I missed my family and friends in Vietnam. However, my spiritual director advised me that it does not matter where I stay or who I am with, because if I become a priest, I will be with God and his people and stay in God's house. Every person I have met or will meet will be my brothers and sisters. Now I have no feeling of the difference. I am a servant of God. God calls me for his people. Wherever I go, whomever I meet, or whatever I deal with, God is with me, and his blessings and grace for me are always abundant. I am loved everywhere and by all people. I see no difference here.

**Q: Do you want to share more about how God has been working in your life during the past decade? Is there more you want to share with those who have helped support you in this journey?**

**A:** Again, I want to say that my life and my vocation is a great and unconditional love for me. In every moment, God is with me, and He loves me so much. Each person I meet is a great gift from God. They have supported me physically and spiritually. I give thanks to God for the gift of them. I want to thank all people I have met in different parishes, to the Diocese of Providence, to the bishop, priests, and seminarian brothers, and especially to Fr. Frank Santilli and my Grampy Don Turbitt and Nana Pat Turbitt. Also, I am always grateful to my parents, my brothers and sisters-in-law, and all my nephews and nieces in Vietnam who always follow me, pray for me, and encourage me in my journey to the priesthood.

To all of you, please pray for me and continue praying for me, and for all religious and diocesan vocations. We need more and more prayers for more and more vocations to serve God and His people. Thank you!

📍 Pictured L-R

**Country Coordinator Don Turbitt, Deacon Doan Nguyen, Fr. Hiep Nguyen, and Fr. Frank Santilli.**

