Vietnamese Assumptionist ordained to priesthood

By Tanya Connor from *Catholic Free Press*

WORCESTER – People from around the nation – and world – filled Assumption College's Chapel of the Holy Spirit Saturday for the priestly ordination of Brother Dinh G. Vo Tran, a Vietnamese Augustinian of the Assumption who came here from the Philippines.

Bishop McManus told Father Vo Tran's family they honored those present by their presence. He noted that the new priest's father, Ry Gra Vo, was sick at home in Sydney, Australia. He offered his prayers, and thanks to him and his wife, Phuong Thi Tran, for giving their son to the Church. The congregation applauded.

Bishop McManus also thanked the Vietnamese priests, religious and laity for their witness. They came from Vietnam, Canada, Pennsylvania and Our Lady of Vilna Parish here, where Father Vo Tran celebrated one of his Masses Sunday (the other two were at Assumption College).

"You have shown to us … that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," the bishop said.

"I was very touched by what the bishop said with respect to the Church in Vietnam," said Assumptionist Father Dennis Gallagher, the college's vice president for mission, who oversees campus ministry, where Father Vo Tran will continue to serve. Faith seems to shine more brightly where external forces are aimed at stamping it out. He said when he visited Vietnam with Father Vo Tran last November he saw a vocation born out of a defiance of the Communist regime.

Father Vo Tran told The Catholic Free Press his seminary class in Vietnam was the first to start up after the Communists took over South Vietnam in 1975. It started underground in 1989, he said.

Born in 1972 in Danang, Vietnam, he completed his seminary training for the Dalat Diocese and from 1991 to 2002 served in three parishes. For historical and family reasons he could not do public ministry as a priest, he said. His bishop suggested his chances of ordination might be better in a religious community and sent him to study in the Philippines.

There he met Religious of the Assumption doing ministry and Assumptionists from Worcester seeking candidates for their congregation. Their following of the Rule of St. Augustine, one of his favorite saints, attracted him, and in 2002 he came to their community at Assumption College, with Filipinos also considering an Assumptionist vocation.

One of those Filipinos, Father Lowe Dongor, was among priests laying hands on him Saturday. Father Dongor ended up studying for the priesthood for the Worcester Diocese, and was ordained last June. Last June Father Vo Tran was ordained to the transitional diaconate with the diocese's candidates. He had made his final vows as an Assumptionist in October 2009.

At the end of Saturday's Mass Father Vo Tran said he is in debt to his parents and thanked the Dalat Diocese for giving him a home in which he could grow, the Assumptionists for accepting him as he is and Bishop McManus for giving birth to his priestly ministry.

Priestly life gives him the freedom to love everything and more opportunity to cultivate peace and create beauty, he said. He said his ordination is a mystery of love, peace and beauty, because “the only thing that remains is love,” a quote used on his ordination invitation.

Sister Ha Ngan Vo Tran, Father Vo Tran’s sister who is a member of Our Lady of the Missions in Kenya, said the ordination was a joyful occasion for their family, the Assumptionist family and the Catholic family.

“I can see the people really love my brother, and I can see the different nationalities,” she said.

She translated for her mother, who said she was very happy, that all she could say was “thank you” to God and the Blessed Mother, and that she was enjoying being here.

“It’s a wonderful day; I’m speechless, just overwhelmed,” said Father Vo Tran’s other sister, Huong Ngoc Vo Tran. She came in from Australia with her mother and with her husband, Truong Ngoc Phung, and their sons, James An, 7, and Francis Khang, 6.

She said the family jokes that she and her siblings couldn’t get along, so their mother put them on three different continents. Seriously she said, “Whenever we see each other, we cherish every single minute of it.”

Among those attending the ordination were family friends and Father Vo Tran’s priest friends from Vietnam and a family friend from Los Angeles, she said.

Father John Franck, vice chair of the college’s board of trustees and the Assumptionists’ director of vocations, recognized the international presence at a reception afterwards. He applied to the new priest the Middle Eastern saying, “Blessed is he who hungers for friends – for, though he may not realize it, his soul is crying out for God.” Father Vo Tran is a man of the heart, who perceives, understands and feels things deeply, a man quick to volunteer, often at the expense of his free time or sleep, he said.