



On Sunday, October 14, 2012 in the church of St. Hippolyte, in the 13th arrondissement of Paris, Br. PHAM VAN DUONG (Pierre) became the first blind Assumptionist ever to be ordained. Most Rev. Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, auxiliary bishop of Paris, imposed hands on Pierre before a multinational, standing-room-only crowd, which included not only many members of the local Vietnamese and Chinese communities but also Pierre's Assumptionist brothers and a large contingent of children, beneficiaries of Pierre's religious education classes at the parish.

Pierre, 33 years of age, became blind in 2004 as the result of a virus which attacked his optic nerve. A Vietnamese national, he came to know of the Assumptionists while he was studying in Moscow. There he looked for a church where he could join a Catholic community for Mass and other celebrations. He ended up at the Assumptionist parish of St. Louis des Francais, where he began his vocational journey.

Pierre is the first blind person in France to be ordained a priest. The revised canon law of the Catholic Church does not prevent the ordination of the blind. Canon 930 states: "A blind or otherwise infirm priest licitly celebrates the eucharistic sacrifice by using any approved text of the Mass with the assistance, if needed, of another priest, deacon, or even a properly instructed lay person."

Many adaptations need to occur in order to assure that a person with handicaps can effectively carry out his ministry. In Pierre's case, he was able to complete his seminary studies thanks to a computer that had vocal recognition and to Biblical and liturgical texts in Braille.

Pierre is an extraordinary young man who has dealt with his blindness and all the challenges it poses with a smile and lots of patience. He'll need all of this and more when he returns to Vietnam next month to assume his new responsibilities as assistant master of novices.