

We are the Community. We are the Church.

*Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the First Mass
at Sacred Heart Church at Nelthorpe Street
on September 5, 2015*

28

March 14-15, 2015

Ordained priest's first Mass was at Sacred Heart

The young Vietnamese seminarian had to escape his village in '77 because of the crackdown on the Catholic church by the communists.

His torturous journey took him through Cambodia where the murderous Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot was engaged in heinous genocides.

In May '80, when he finally thought he had reached the safety of Thailand, a Thai soldier looking for gold grabbed him, and with a bamboo cane struck him repeatedly.

The beatings by soldiers, when he was tied to a tree, continued for a few days, from his head to his feet. To this day he has scars on his head and hands.

Finally, when he became sick and was losing consciousness, he was taken to a Red Cross camp in Cambodia in February '80, but was moved to a camp in Thailand two months later.

At the camp, he wrote to the nuncio in Bangkok about his desire to go to a country where he could complete requirements for ordination. He was advised to write to the nuncio in Canada and on January '81 he was accepted.

Six months later, on 22 June '81, he landed at Mirabel International Airport in Montreal and was welcomed as a Vietnamese refugee by Canada and accommodated in a hotel.

A few days later priests from the Grand Séminaire went to the hotel and told him another priest would come the next day to take him to the Séminaire.

And guess who this individual was? None other than Sacred Heart Church's former pastor Fr. Guy Merveille, who had helped many Vietnamese refugees in the past. [Between '75 and '76, Canada admitted just over 5,600 Vietnamese immigrants. In '79 and '80, another 50,000 refugees, who later became known as the "Boat People," settled in Canada].

Fr. Guy helped him enroll in French courses, got him a home stay, took him to Ottawa to get his Certificate of Identity, took him to Rome, Lourdes and Paris, and contacted Fr. Harold Heard, his successor at Sacred Heart Parish, to get a meeting with Bishop

Remi de Roo. But before the Vietnamese seminarian left for Victoria, Fr. Guy took him for a drive to Vermont and Burlington in the U.S.

On arrival in Victoria in April '83, and after a meeting with Bishop de Roo, he began assisting Fr. Heard at the parish and he stayed with parishioners, going from family to family. Then he got the call from the diocese's vicar general, Fr. Sigismond Lajoie, OFM, later also Sacred Heart pastor, that he was being sent to St. Paul University in Ottawa to complete his requirements for ordination.

In March '84, Bishop de Roo called him back to Victoria to be admitted to the diaconate in the diocese along with Michael Lapierre, another later Sacred Heart pastor.

After his final examinations in Ottawa, the Vietnamese-born deacon was sent to Port Hardy for two months to fill a vacancy in the parish until a permanent replacement was appointed, and then to Sacred Heart to assist Fr. Lajoie, who had replaced Fr. Heard.

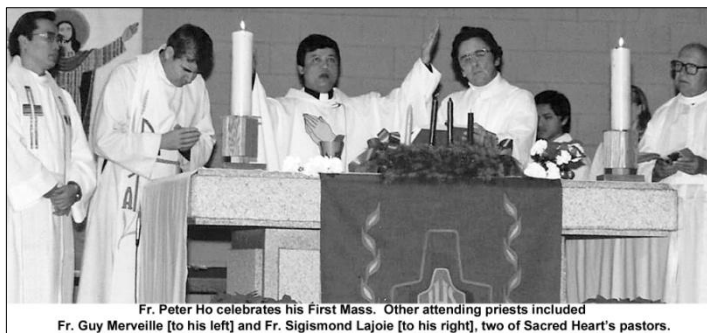
On 8 December '84, he was ordained at St. Andrew's Cathedral and the next day celebrated his first Mass at Sacred Heart Church, the first priest to do so after ordination.

And who gave the homily? Fr. Guy Merveille. In July '85 he went back to Montreal to visit Fr. Guy and others. It was the last time he would see Fr. Guy. After his ordination, Fr. Peter Hò was assigned as associate pastor at Sacred Heart and thus began the Masses celebrated in Vietnamese in the Victoria diocese. Six months later, Fr.

Peter Hò was transferred to St. Andrew's Cathedral.

In '87 he joined up with the late Karel and the late Eleanor Van Bourgondien to form a charitable foundation, the Ho Mission Refugee Association, to raise funds to sponsor some 15 refugees in camps in Southeast Asia.

And when the Canadian government ended its refugee assistance program, they formed another organization to help the needs of Churches, schools and religious orders in Vietnam.



Fr. Peter Ho celebrates his First Mass. Other attending priests included Fr. Guy Merveille [to his left] and Fr. Sigismond Lajoie [to his right], two of Sacred Heart's pastors.

In '94 he was assigned as assistant pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Oak Bay and in '01 as pastor until his retirement in May '10.

Fr. Peter Ho was born on 23 January '44 in Tân Hòa village in Vietnam to Lê Thị Phạn, his Christian mother, and Hồ Văn Ngự, from a Buddhist tradition.

His name at birth was Hồ Văn Mây with Phê-rô [Peter] Hồ as his Christian name in baptism. In Victoria he is Fr. Peter Ho.

He had five brothers and four sisters: three brothers and one sister died at an early age and a brother and a sister died when he was pastor at St. Patrick's.

One brother and two sisters still live in Tân Hòa village to this day. He has visited his family in Vietnam thrice since coming to Canada.

When he was eight, in '52, Fr. Ho went to a boarding school run by the French Soeurs de la Divine Providence, about 30 kilometres from his village, where the French nuns called him

Pierre. But over the next years he went to school in villages, boarding with his relatives.

After completing his elementary school in '57 he went to the minor seminary in Sóc Trăng City in another province [today it is the St. Peter Doan Cong Quy — named after a Vietnamese saint — a Major Seminary that moved to Cần Thơ in '62] and then to Adran Lasan College in Đà Lạt in '65, where he completed his baccalaureate in '67. His next step was to continue his studies at the Major Seminary of Saint-Suplice in Vĩnh Long.

On 18 October '70, his mother passed away. This left him devastated. After two years of pastoral work, he returned to the seminary, but when the Viet Cong took over the south in '75, he had to abandon his studies, just a few months short of completion and ordination, and flee lest he was imprisoned.

The '06 book, *Peter Hồ Văn Mây A Journey*, by the late Gilbert Taggart captured Fr. Ho's physical and psychological hardships he endured on his path to be a diocesan priest in Victoria.



Focus on Asia

Continued from bulletin #27

Philippines: Filipinos had many gods, spirits, creatures before an Arab trader introduced Islam in Mindanao in 1380 and before Spain introduced Catholicism, nearly two centuries later, in 1565 with the arrival of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi.

By the time the Spanish arrived, Islam was firmly established in Mindanao and Sulu and had outposts in Cebu and Luzon. There were six rajahs [three in Manila], a sultan and 13 datus in pre-Hispanic Philippines.

In keeping with the tradition of expelling Jews and Moros [Moors] from Spain, Legaspi quickly dispersed the Muslims from Luzon and the Visayan Islands and started Christianization.

The Spaniards, during their three centuries of rule, were never able to dominate the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu nor were the Americans during their rule in the first half of the 1990s.

Today, there are five datus, two sultans and 17 royal houses of the decentralized Lanao sultanate in Mindanao and nine datus of the Lumad, or indigenous people, in the southern Philippines.

The Spaniard missionaries built churches in central plazas and thus Catholicism became the focus of town life with masses, confessions, baptisms, funerals and marriages as part of the people's daily life. There were fiestas and liturgical seasons were observed in the plazas. Markets and cockfight pits sprang up near the church bells.

In the early years, the educated elite had an understanding of Catholicism and its theology while urban and rural masses had a more superficial understanding of a one God mixed with indigenous animism — for instance, a bamboo cross at the corner of a rice field to keep away insects from damaging the crop or a folk healer using Catholic symbols and liturgy mixed with pre-Hispanic rituals.

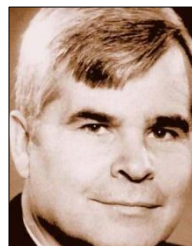
During U.S. rule from 1898-1946, the U.S. government implemented the separation of church and state. This reduced

significantly the political power exerted by the church and led to the establishment of other religions, particularly Protestantism, and reduced the percentage of Catholics in the population.

The last census in 2010, indicated that there are 74.2 million Catholics — the largest in Asia — or 80.6 per cent of the population. However, according to the latest Social Weather Stations survey, weekly church attendance has declined from 64 per cent in July 1991 to only 37 per cent in February 2013.



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Fr. Guy Merveille

While serving as director of the Pope John XXIII Ecumenical Center in Paoli, Pennsylvania, Fr. Guy made numerous trips to Philadelphia to raise funds for refugees of war-torn Bangladesh. More than \$4,000 was raised, the Lubbock Avalanche Journal reported on 3 March '73.

In November '73, a U.S. Secretary of State's cable to eight U.S. embassies in South America, revealed by Wikileaks, indicates that Fr. Guy and Fr. William Sabatino were principal organizers of a Congress on World Unity and Brotherhood to be held in July '76 in Philadelphia as part of the Bicentennial Commemoration.

It stated that the two priests had in recent months visited countries in the Near East, Europe and Africa, that Fr. Guy was scheduled to visit the South American countries from 3 to 31 January '74 and that the State Department would "appreciate any courtesies posts may appropriately extend to Rev. Merveille during tour."

It was Fr. Guy's dream of heading the World Congress and he travelled to 75 countries lining up humanists for the congress. At the congress, Nobel Prize winners Linus Pauling and Philip Noel Baker and Ava Helen Pauling, Sophia Wadia and Ivan Supek, adopted the Dubrovnik Declaration, which has since been called Dubrovnik – Philadelphia Declaration.

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