

# The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugee Religious, Priests, and Seminarians in the United States, 1975–1977

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*The fall of Saigon (1975) was a significant factor in the large numbers of Vietnamese American vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This event led some 125,000 refugees from South Vietnam to the U.S., including hundreds of priests, seminarians, and men and women religious. Their sudden presence prompted a host of responses from American Catholics under the leadership and coordination of the United States Catholic Conference. This leadership led to relatively quick resettlement of religious, priests, and seminarians. Combining exilic experience and identity with the Catholic faith, these refugees established communities in the U.S. and promoted vocations to the priesthood and religious life for the preservation of Vietnamese tradition and faith in their new home.*

*Keywords:* Vietnam War; Vietnamese refugees; fall of Saigon; South Vietnam; Vietnamese-American priests; Vietnamese-American religious; United States Catholic Conference; Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix; Incarnatio-Consecratio Institute; Lovers of the Holy Cross; McGinnis, S.C.M.M., Sister Sheila; Murray, M.M., Father Eugene; Tracy, Bishop Robert; Law, Bishop Bernard; Tĩnh, Father Nguyễn Văn

**A**mong the most notable characteristics of Vietnamese American Catholicism is the prominence of priests, seminarians, and members of religious orders. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reported that 6% of newly ordained priests in 2009 were Vietnamese—a higher number than their representation in the U.S. Catholic population.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Teresa Nguyen, LHC, "Vietnamese Vocations," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/vocation-directors/vietnamese-vocations.cfm>.

Over 800 Vietnamese priests were serving in the U.S. Church in the early 2010s, most of whom were former refugees or first-generation immigrants.<sup>2</sup> Having resettled in the U.S. since 1975, communities of Vietnamese-American religious such as the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer, the Lovers of the Holy Cross, and the Dominican Sisters of Houston perform important pastoral work among Vietnamese Americans. Numerous Vietnamese refugees and immigrants have joined American provinces of Jesuits, Dominicans, the Society of the Divine Word, and the Sisters of Christian Charity, among others. Vietnamese vocations to the priesthood and religious orders have been impressive, though it is an overstatement to call them the “new Irish” or claim they significantly “swell” the number of U.S. Catholic clergy.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to 1970s war refugees, normalized relations between the U.S. and Vietnam since the 1990s have led to a small but noticeable number of seminarians and religious members immigrating to the U.S. for training and pastoral work. In 2011, eight Carmelite nuns from Vietnam came to Alabama at the invitation of the archbishop of Mobile who, in consultation with Vietnamese American religious, asked them to revitalize a monastery in his diocese.<sup>4</sup> In a similar situation, seven members of a Cistercian monastery in central Vietnam arrived at Assumption Abbey in Missouri in 2013.<sup>5</sup> Some seminarians from Vietnam have studied to become diocesan priests for U.S. dioceses. In 2008, a Vietnamese American Jesuit established the non-profit

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2. This number is based on the list, “Linh Mục Việt Nam tại Hoa Kỳ” [Vietnamese Priests in the United States], found on the website of the Federation of Vietnamese Catholics in the U.S.: <http://www.liendoanconggiao.net/doc/danh sach/LinhMucVietNamTai-HoaKy.doc>. The list records 779 priests and 1 bishop, contradicting the oft-cited estimate of 450–500 priests in 2015 from Nguyen, “Vietnamese Vocations.” Using additional information, I came to an estimate of about 900 priests in 2012 and 950 in 2017. See Tuan Hoang, “How Many Vietnamese Catholic Priests Are There in the U.S.?” (September 17, 2017): <https://tuannyriver.com/2017/09/17/how-many-vietnamese-catholic-priests-are-there-in-the-u-s/>.

3. David Haldane and Mai Tran, “New ‘Irish’ Priests Are Vietnamese,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 15, 2007): <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/apr/15/local/me-vietpriests15>; Gustav Niebuhr, “Vietnamese Immigrants Swell Catholic Clergy,” *New York Times* (April 24, 2000): <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/24/us/vietnamese-immigrants-swell-catholic-clergy.html?mcubz=1>.

4. Benjamin Mann, “Carmelite Nuns Come from Vietnam to Alabama to Revitalize Monastery” (February 23, 2011): <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/US.php?id=2693>.

5. Ryan Scheussler, “A Fading Missouri Monastery Finds New Life—in Vietnam,” Public Radio International (December 26, 2017): <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-12-26/fading-missouri-monastery-finds-new-life-vietnam>; “Vietnamese Monks to Move to Southwest Missouri Abbey,” *Missourian* (December 11, 2013): [https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/state\\_news/vietnamese-monks-to-move-to-southwest-missouri-abbey/article\\_24dd98b9-9b03-56c2-8f7d-1480b0893152.html](https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/state_news/vietnamese-monks-to-move-to-southwest-missouri-abbey/article_24dd98b9-9b03-56c2-8f7d-1480b0893152.html). Assumption Abbey had been Trappist but became Cistercian after the Vietnamese influx.

Formation Support for Vietnam to assist Vietnamese religious, seminarians, and priests in their studies in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Two seminarians came to Rhode Island in 2012 to begin studies for the Diocese of Providence, and three came in 2017 to study for the Diocese of Burlington.<sup>7</sup> Their association with Burlington received direct support from U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, a Catholic in the diocese. In the Archdiocese of Louisville, two seminarians from central Vietnam agreed to serve in the Archdiocese after ordination for at least a few years before making a final decision to stay on or return to Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> This pattern is among the latest examples in which foreign-born priests and men and women religious migrated to the U.S. at the invitation of American bishops and with coordination among members of their ethnic cohort.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to these transnational interactions over recent years, the initial mass arrival of Vietnamese religious, priests, and seminarians occurred in dramatic fashion beginning in 1975. On April 30, 1975, the government of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) surrendered unconditionally to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, formally ending the Vietnam War. Although many observers had expected this outcome after the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, the demise of South Vietnam was shocking because it occurred after only five months of resumed hostilities. The six weeks before the RVN's surrender saw rapid advancement of the communist military and often chaotic retreat among the RVN armed forces.<sup>10</sup> The chaos only grew as communist troops approached Saigon, leading to tens of thousands of South

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6. Elizabeth Murray, "From Vietnam to Vermont: Three Men Train to Be Priests in the U.S.," *Burlington Free Press* (August 24, 2017): <http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/2017/08/24/vietnam-vermont-three-men-train-priests-u-s/578001001/>; Kymelya Sari, "Vietnamese Seminary Candidates Find New Home in Vermont," *Seven Days: Vermont's Independence Voice* (September 19, 2018): <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/vietnamese-seminary-candidates-find-new-home-in-vermont/Content?oid=20661186>. The background to Formation Support for Vietnam is described on its website: <http://fsvn.org/about-fsvn/history/>.

7. Brian J. Lowney, "Vietnamese Seminarians Prepare to Minister in America," *Rhode Island Catholic* (August 27, 2012): <http://thercatholic.com/stories/Vietnamese-seminarians-prepare-to-minister-in-America,5157>.

8. Ruby Thomas, "Local Priests Visit Diocese in Vietnam," *The Record* (April 14, 2016): <http://therecordnewspaper.org/local-priests-visit-diocese-in-vietnam/>; Quân Nguyễn, "Thánh lễ truyền chức Phó Tế tại Tổng Giáo phận Louisville, Hoa Kỳ" [Ordination Mass to the Diaconate at the Archdiocese of Louisville in the United States], *VietCatholic News* (March 27, 2017): <http://www.vietcatholic.net/News/Html/217798.htm>.

9. See, for example, Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 43–64; Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 118.

10. See George J. Veith, *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973–1975* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

Vietnamese departures during the final days before the surrender. Among the 125,000 refugees were hundreds of religious men and women, priests, and seminarians, and their unexpected appearance on American soil prompted responses from the U.S. government, the U.S. Catholic Church, and the Vatican through the apostolic delegate to the U.S.

Using archival records from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB)/United States Catholic Conference (USCC) and publications from the Catholic press in Vietnam and the diaspora, this article will focus on the initial resettlement of priests, seminarians, and religious during the two years following the fall of Saigon. It will interpret the American response in the context of the exilic experience and the Catholic identity of the refugees, arguing that the experience of national loss was painful to the refugees, though the resettlement effort on the part of the U.S. Church marked the first step toward the reconstitution and adaptation of their ethnic Catholicism in American society. The fall of Saigon and their reception in the U.S. prompted the establishment of Vietnamese Catholic communities in the U.S. These communities have promoted the importance of Vietnamese-American clergy and religious to secure continuity in their new homeland with their Catholic past in Vietnam.

### **From South Vietnam to America**

After the Geneva Peace Accords partitioned Vietnam in 1954, thousands of priests, seminarians, and religious from the North (under the control of the Vietnamese Communist Party) accompanied the faithful as they moved to the South.<sup>11</sup> This migration helped increase the number of the clergy in South Vietnam to 1,264 diocesan and religious priests, including a minimal number of European missionary priests. By 1963, the number rose to 1,685 priests plus 568 major seminarians and 2,474 minor seminarians, among nearly 1.5 million Catholics in South Vietnam. In comparison, there were only 333 priests to care for 833,000 Catholics in the Northern dioceses: a result of migration and governmental refusal to allow new ordinations.<sup>12</sup> The differences grew further during the Vietnam War as the Northern Church necessarily focused on survival while the Southern Church witnessed a blossoming of educational, charitable, medical, and other institutions. Thriving, too, was a devotional and associational culture of the laity organized around

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11. At 676,348, Catholics made up 76.3% of the Northern migrants to the South. The clergy played an essential role in mobilizing this high number. See Peter Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 173–211.

12. *Việt Nam Công Giáo Niên Giám 1964* [Catholic Yearbook of Vietnam 1964] (Saigon: Sacerdos, 1963), 242, 504–505.

Catholic Action.<sup>13</sup> By 1975, there were 26 bishops, approximately 2,500 priests, and over 1.8 million lay Catholics: about 10% of the general population of South Vietnam.<sup>14</sup>

Although the RVN and the U.S. enjoyed close military and diplomatic relations, the Cold War alliance translated to a relatively small presence of Vietnamese Catholics in the U.S. before the 1970s. Because of their colonial past, many more Vietnamese Catholics studied and worked in France, Belgium, and other European countries before 1965. Catholics that came to the U.S. often remained for a short period of time. Nonetheless, an organization of Vietnamese Catholic students in the U.S. was formed as early as 1950.<sup>15</sup> A small number of priests and religious also traveled to America for studies, training, or other assignments. In 1967, there were at least twelve priests in the U.S., including Dominic Mai Thanh Luong, who became the first Vietnamese American bishop thirty-six years later. There were another dozen members of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary, who came to Philadelphia at the invitation of Cardinal John Krol to work at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary or pursue studies.<sup>16</sup> One outcome of their presence was the formation of the Community of Vietnamese Clergy and Religious in America (CVCRA, *Cộng Đồng Tu Sĩ Việt Nam Tại Mỹ Châu*) in 1970.<sup>17</sup> Months before the fall of Saigon, its membership included 103. There were 29 priests in the U.S., 2 in Canada, and 1 each in Colombia and Venezuela; 9 religious brothers and seminarians in the U.S. and 2 in Canada; and 33 religious sisters in the U.S. and 26 in Canada.<sup>18</sup>

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13. For more on the Vietnamese Church, see Tuan Hoang, “Ultramontanism, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon: Historicizing the Vietnamese American Catholic Experience,” *American Catholic Studies* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1–36.

14. Việt Châu, “Giáo Hội Việt Nam Hôm Nay” [The Vietnamese Church Today], *Dân Chúa* [People of God] 1 (February 1977), 22.

15. Phạm Quang Thúy and Hà Tôn Vinh, “Sự Chuyển Hướng của Hội Sinh Viên Công Giáo Việt Nam tại Mỹ Châu” [The Shift in the Association of Vietnamese Catholic Students in America], *Đặc San Tin Mừng: Giáng Sinh* [Good News: Christmas Edition] (December 1980): 52.

16. Hoang, “Ultramontanism, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon,” 17–18; “Preliminary Directory of Foreign Priests Studying in the United States,” folder “Education: Foreign Students, 1967–1972,” box 66, United States Catholic Conference Records (hereafter as USCCR), American Catholic History Research Center, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (hereafter ACUA).

17. Việt Châu, “Giáo Hội Việt Nam Hôm Nay,” 23; Trần Phúc Long, “Đại Hội Linh Mục và Tu Sĩ Việt Nam tại Washington DC” [Convention of Vietnamese Priests and Religious in Washington, DC], *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* [The Immaculate Heart of Mary] 10 (October 1978): 22.

18. “Danh Sách Công Đồng Tu Sĩ Việt Nam Tại Mỹ Châu 1974–1975” [List of Members of the Community of Vietnamese Clergy and Religious in America, 1974–1975], folder “Ad Hoc Committee: Migration and Tourism: Vietnamese Religious, Priests, and Seminarians, 1975 May–June,” box 45, National Conference of Catholic Bishops Records (hereafter NCCBR), ACUA. Folders under this heading will appear as “VRPS” followed by the year(s) and months and, if applicable, the last subtitle.

In the absence of scholarly studies of the relation between the U.S. Church and the Church in South Vietnam, it appears that Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which had operated in Vietnam since 1952, was the most visible, influential, and knowledgeable, if sometimes controversial, American Catholic organizational presence in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, three weeks before the fall of Saigon, Archbishop Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati and NCCB/USCC president, asked CRS to draft a general appeal to American Catholics regarding the swift rise of refugees and orphans in the country.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the USCC general secretary, Bishop James Rausch, asked John McCarthy, director of the USCC Office of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), to coordinate activities among American Catholics on behalf of those in need of resettlement.<sup>21</sup>

Rausch, however, could not have anticipated the rapidity of events in the next two weeks nor the sudden arrival of hundreds of religious, priests, and seminarians in U.S. territories, especially Guam. The resettlement of Vietnamese refugees became a priority for the NCCB/USCC, of which Rausch, McCarthy, and Father Michael Sheehan, the assistant general secretary, led the coordination. In the words of Archbishop Jean Jadot, the Vatican's apostolic delegate to the U.S., the MRS faced "a task of immense proportions." Jadot asked the USCC for information about refugee priests, seminarians, and religious so that "provisions [could] be made for their incardination or canonical affiliation with religious congregations in the country in which they will be living." "Our experience," he added, "with other refugee groups in the past has shown the necessity of prompt action in this regard."<sup>22</sup>

Jadot was of one mind with the USCC on the need for speedy resettlement. He assigned a representative to seek information regarding the refugee priests and religious in Guam and other refugee camps.<sup>23</sup> By this time, the

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19. Christopher J. Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests: Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam, 1954–1975," *Catholic Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2005): 223–250; Scott Flipse, "The Latest Casualty of War: Catholic Relief Services, Humanitarianism, and the War in Vietnam, 1967–1968," *Peace & Change* 27, no. 2 (2002): 245–270.

20. Edward Swanstrom to James Rausch, April 8, 1975, folder "Related Organizations: Catholic Relief Services Vietnam, 1975–1976," box 121, USCCR, ACUA. Swanstrom was the executive director of CRS.

21. James Rausch to U.S. Bishops, April 16, 1975, folder "Related Organizations: Catholic Relief Services Vietnam, 1975–1976," box 121, USCCR, ACUA. On the background of Bernardin's and Rausch's work in the NCCB/USCC, see Thomas J. Reese, S.J., *A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 47–59, 82–89.

22. Jean Jadot to James Rausch, May 15, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May–June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

23. Michael Sheehan to John McCarthy, May 29, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May–June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.





**Vietnamese refugee priests preside at a funeral Mass at Fort Chaffee, near Fort Smith, Arkansas, 1975. Fort Chaffee was one of four resettlement centers for the Vietnamese established after the fall of Saigon (Courtesy of the Southeast Asian Archive, University of California Irvine Libraries).**

U.S. government had established four continental centers to process the refugees: Camp Pendleton in California, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, and Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. The number of refugees on Guam and at these centers constantly fluctuated during the spring and summer.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, an exchange of information between the MRS and the apostolic delegate's office established that by the end of May, there were 81 priests on Guam along with 78 sisters and 91 brothers; and 4 priests and 9 seminarians and men and women religious at Eglin.<sup>25</sup> This information gave the USCC and the apostolic delegate a more accurate understanding of the task of resettlement.

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24. Refugees first arrived at Camp Pendleton on April 29; Fort Chaffee on May 2; Eglin Air Force Base on May 4; Fort Indiantown Gap on May 28. See Operations and Readiness Directorate, "After Action Report: Operations New Life/New Arrivals, US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program, 1 April 1975-1 June 1976" (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1977), I-A-9 and I-A-10. Guam was the most significant receiving center since 112,000 refugees underwent initial processing there before moving to the continental centers or, in some cases, another country of resettlement.

25. Michael Sheehan to Richard Pates, May 29, 1975; "Eglin Field 2 Refugee List of Priests and Religious," folder "VRPS 1975 May-June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

## Bishop Robert Tracy: The First Liaison

The scope of the resettlement became more evident by the end of June 1975 when most refugees had been moved from Guam to the continental centers. In the meantime, the USCC appointed Robert Tracy, retired bishop of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and chairman of the NCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and Tourism, to be the special liaison between the USCC and the refugee clergy, religious, and seminarians. To assist Tracy, the USCC reached out to the Maryknoll missionaries and acquired the service of Father Eugene Murray, M.M., then living in New York after sixteen years as a missionary in Taiwan.<sup>26</sup>

Following a meeting on June 13 with McCarthy, Rausch, and Sheehan, among others, Bishop Tracy and Father Murray undertook a ten-day visit to the processing center at Fort Indiantown Gap. They interviewed 22 refugee priests, 12 major seminarians, 7 minor seminarians, 21 religious brothers, and 20 sisters. Assisting them were three Vietnamese “contract priests,” who had studied or worked in America before the fall of Saigon and, therefore, could be employed by the U.S. Army to work at the camp. Given the remarkably high estimate that about 45% of the refugees were Catholic, the camp authorities organized four chapel sites for prayer and worship. An estimated 4,000–5,000 attended Sunday Mass, and 1,200 refugees participated in daily Mass. At each camp, the USCC also established an office to process the refugees, whether Catholic or not. The office at Fort Indiantown Gap included seventeen paid employees and five volunteers. Similar to the other three offices, it dealt strictly with matters of resettlement, not pastoral care.<sup>27</sup>

Bishop Tracy was optimistic during the visit, stating that he felt that sponsorship would be “possible” and “simple” for an estimated 150 priests and 250 religious in the four camps. He recommended that the USCC “get the facts about sponsorship” and “provide a ‘covering letter’ to ordinaries and major superiors” throughout the U.S. He noted too that “some [but] not many” of the refugee religious, priests, and seminarians had “family members with them” and suggested that, if possible, “they could be settled in the same general area.”<sup>28</sup>

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26. Joseph Glynn to James Rausch, June 9, 1975; Joseph Bernardin to Jean Jadot, June 11, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 May–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

27. Report by Robert Tracy, June 24, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 May–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

28. Robert Tracy to Michael Sheehan, June 25, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 May–June,” box 45, NCCBR. The estimate appears in Robert Tracy to potential sponsors, July 2, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 July,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA. As understood later, the total number of clergy to be resettled was much higher.



Central to Tracy's recommendation was the distinction between "sponsorship" and "permanent affiliation." Although no length was specified, sponsorship was meant to be temporary so that the refugees could further discern their futures and begin to address migration-related issues. These concerns ranged from anxiety about resettlement to acclimating to American culture to receiving intensive English instruction. While it was possible for the refugees to gain permanent affiliation with a diocese or a congregation, sponsored clergy and religious were not bound to any long-term obligation. Pushing for sponsorship status, Tracy argued that the refugees "should not be kept waiting for release until Fr. Murray can get around to visiting them." "They need," he stressed, "to get out of these camps *at once*." In the final report, he and Murray specified that sponsors would provide housing, food, incidentals, and especially English instruction for "some months." They even advised that ordinaries and major superiors should not look to the refugees for help with local pastoral needs: "not at first, later on perhaps."<sup>29</sup>

### **Bishop Bernard Law and the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix**

Even before Bishop Tracy and Father Murray visited Fort Indiantown Gap, a remarkable sponsorship was initiated at Fort Chaffee. At the end of May, Bernard Law, who had become the bishop of the Diocese of Springfield–Cape Girardeau, Missouri two years before, agreed to receive all members of the Congregation of Mother Co-Redemptrix (CMC) into his small, mostly rural diocese. On June 30, exactly two months after the fall of Saigon, forty-eight CMC members boarded a bus at Fort Chaffee and headed north to their new diocese.

The CMC community dated to the early 1940s when Trần Đình Thủ, a young diocesan priest in a highly Catholic and anticommunist area of northern Vietnam, organized a group of seminarians and laity for consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. In 1948, he received permission from the local bishop to begin forming a religious institute. He reached this goal five years later when the Vatican approved the CMC as a religious order.<sup>30</sup> The following year saw the military

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29. Robert Tracy to potential sponsors, July 2, 1975; Robert Tracy to Michael Sheehan, June 26, 1975; "Final Report of Bishop Robert E. Tracy and Father Eugene Murray," June 26, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May–June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

30. Known in Vietnamese as *Đòng Đức Mẹ Đồng Công Cứu Chuộc*, the CMC is known to Catholics in Vietnam and the diaspora by its abbreviated name *Đòng Đồng Công* ("Co-Redemptrix Congregation"). In 2017, the order changed its name to the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer (CMR)—*Đòng Mẹ Chúa Cứu Chuộc* in Vietnamese—at the request of the Vatican due to theological ambiguity about the concept of Mary as "co-redemptrix."



Vietnamese Catholic congregants at a funeral Mass at Fort Chaffee, near Fort Smith, Arkansas, 1975 (Courtesy of the Southeast Asian Archive, University of California Irvine Libraries).

victory at Dien Bien Phu that led to communist control of the North. On July 5, 1954, Thù decided to “break up” the budding congregation, if informally, so its members could move about and escape the communists more easily. The signing of the Geneva Peace Accords, however, brought the order back together. With approximately 125 members in various stages of formation and vows, they moved to the South and resettled in suburban Saigon.<sup>31</sup>

In the North, Thù and his group had some involvement in spreading Marian devotion. In South Vietnam, however, the CMC became a much more prominent voice in the promotion of this devotion, particularly for leading the Fatima-inspired Movement for Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary that was independent but similar to Marian reparation movements in the U.S. and Western Europe. Participating in a vibrant Vietnamese Catholic press, the congregation published a well-received popular devotional monthly between 1960 and 1975, reaching a distribution of 40,000

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31. “Lược Sử Dòng Đồng Công từ Phôi Dựng đến Tháng 4 Năm 1975” [Summary History of the Congregation of Mother Co-Redemptrix from the Beginning to April 1975], *Biểu Chứng Đức Tin và Tình Yêu: Testimony of Faith and Love* (Carthage, MO: CMC Brothers, 1986), 60–63.

copies in its last year.<sup>32</sup> As a wholly native and relatively new congregation, the CMC could not match the resources and prestige of other religious orders with long historical ties and strong support from abroad. Nonetheless, by making Our Lady of Fatima and the Movement for Reparation their central mission in South Vietnam, the religious community carved out a modest but appealing and well-timed position within Vietnamese Catholic culture.

Repeating its approach to the communist rise to power in 1954, the CMC leadership again informally “dismissed” all members three weeks before the fall of Saigon. The purpose was to facilitate the movement of members to coastal areas for a potential escape by sea. On April 29, CMC members boarded seven boats and headed toward international waters to be picked up by the U.S. Navy. Although dozens of members, including Father Thủ, could not leave Vietnam, the majority sought refuge in Guam before moving to Camp Pendleton, Fort Indiantown Gap, and, for most of the refugees, Fort Chaffee.<sup>33</sup> At first, the CMC resettlement appeared to be complicated by size: numbering about 170, it was by far the largest group of refugee religious, men or women. At Guam and the continental camps, CMC leadership wrote to U.S. Church leaders asking for help in resettling the community. “I am certain,” wrote one bishop in response, “that no single diocese would be able to absorb the total membership of a Community as large as your own.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, a response from another diocese stated that it could “place a few here” but “it seems there are larger needs than we can fulfill.”<sup>35</sup>

Most American bishops and major superiors would have agreed with these judgments. Even the Vietnamese contract priests at Fort Chaffee informed the CMC leaders that it would be virtually impossible for a single diocese or religious order to support the entire group.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, it was another person within the camp, military chaplain Father Thomas F. McAndrew, who successfully arranged for their sponsorship. Described as full of “zeal for the refugees” and someone who “worked long and frustrating hours with practically no time off,” McAndrew contacted several American

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32. Ibid., 63–65; “Sự Diễn Tiến của Phong Trào Đền Tạ Liên Tiếp Trái Tim” [Developments of the Movement of Reparation to the Immaculate Heart], *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* (July 1965): 363–367.

33. “Cuộc Mạo Hiểm Thiên Định” [The Fateful Adventure], *Đặc San Đồng Công 5* [Congregation of Mother Co-Redemptrix: Special Issue 5] (Carthage, MO: 1979), 86–94.

34. William Johnson to Pham Kim Long, July 8, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 July,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

35. William Ortman to Michael Sheehan, June 23, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 May–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

36. *Biểu Chứng Đức Tin và Tình Yêu*, 131.

hierarchs, including Bishop Law in neighboring Missouri.<sup>37</sup> This led Law to propose CMC sponsorship to his diocesan advisory council on May 28 and to his decision to sponsor the entire community. McAndrew informed the CMC leaders two days later, and they eagerly welcomed Law to Fort Chaffee for a visit on June 5. The visit also included a Mass and the commencement of the legal process for sponsorship that resulted in the aforementioned trip by bus to Missouri.<sup>38</sup> Except for a small number that left the congregation, the majority of the CMC refugees, 148 members in total, resettled in Carthage, Missouri later in the year.<sup>39</sup>

In a twist of sorts, the resettlement of the CMC reflected a development in the U.S. Church: the shrinking of membership among religious orders and a growing number of closures of institutions run by religious. In this case, the Diocese of Springfield–Cape Girardeau was home to Our Lady of the Ozarks, a minor seminary in Carthage owned by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). The institution closed in 1970 due to low enrollment, and Law negotiated with the Oblates to rent the twenty-eight-acre property to the CMC for the annual fee of one dollar with the possibility it might be sold to the CMC in the future. OMI involvement was crucial in the decision to sponsor the community. Father William Woestman, OMI, Central Province provincial and Father Joseph Francis, SVD, the president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, accompanied Law during the visit to Fort Chaffee.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the fortuity of a spacious, unused property, the contemplated sponsorship might have matched Law's desire for a greater Catholic presence in a mostly Protestant area of his diocese. As a USCC official wrote, if the refugee religious "could accommodate to the Ozarks, they would be a great blessing for his diocese."<sup>41</sup> Still, even the Oblates' generous offer could not

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37. Michael Sheehan to James Rausch, July 9, 1975; Michael Sheehan to Commanding Officer, July 23, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 July," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

38. "Cuộc Mạo Hiểm Thiên Định," 94–98.

39. "Priests, Seminarians, and Professed Religious of the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemtrix at Carthage, Missouri," folder "VRPS 1975: Lists," box 45, NCCBR. At Fort Chaffee, Bishop Law dispensed the final vows of four members, and two others left the CMC when their temporary vows expired. See Eugene Murray to Michael Sheehan, March 9, 1976, folder "VRPS: Murray, Eugene, MM: Reports on Interviews, 1976 Jan–June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA. Hereafter, folders under this title are cited as "VRPS Murray 1976" followed by the month.

40. John McVeigh to Joseph Marbach, June 6, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May–June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA; "Cuộc Mạo Hiểm Thiên Định," 94; "Lược Sử Dòng Đồng Công," 131–133.

41. Father Kelly to Michael Sheehan, June 26, 1975, folder "Ad Hoc Committee: Migration and Tourism: Vietnamese Priests: Congregation of the Mother Coredeptrix, 1975–77," box 46, NCCBR, ACUA. This folder appears below as "CMC 1975–77." None of

obscure the limitation of resources in this small diocese, prompting Law to seek outside support for the resettlement of the CMC. From the Marianists of Dayton, Ohio, he acquired the assistance of one priest and two brothers, including a former provincial treasurer, for six months at no cost. The treasurer helped Law prepare the “estimated expenditures” for a year, which came to \$226,000. The expenditures included the salaries for seven American sisters who taught “intensive English course for all members of the [CMC].” By November 1975, Law secured \$126,000 from a host of sources, principally from the U.S. government, the Missouri Department of Education, the American Board of Catholic Missions, and “a small foundation.” He asked the USCC to help with one half of the remaining costs of \$100,000 and planned to apply for the other half from the Milwaukee-based De Rance Foundation, at the time one of the largest Catholic charities in the U.S. The USCC, however, as a “non-funding agency,” could not assist.<sup>42</sup> More successfully, Law’s appeal to the De Rance Foundation led to the visit of Donald Gallagher, its executive director, to Carthage during the following summer. The bishop followed up with a detailed letter to Gallagher that listed the expected expenditures of the community to June 1977 at over \$291,000.<sup>43</sup> While the amount of the De Rance Foundation’s gift to the diocese is not known, a subsequent CMC publication lists Gallagher as one of the community’s most significant benefactors.<sup>44</sup> Law and the CMC continued to make appeals to keep the congregation together. The Oblates agreed to sell the campus to the CMC at a discounted cost in 1976. That the sale did not occur until May 1981 suggests a willingness on the part of the OMI to wait for the CMC to gain better financial footing.<sup>45</sup> Many factors contributed to the successful resettlement of the CMC.

### Other Resettlements in 1975

Among the four resettlement camps, Fort Chaffee had the largest number of refugee priests, seminarians, and religious. By July 20, however, the authorities had processed not only the CMC members but also 30 Lasallians who went to the provincial Motherhouse of the Christian Brothers in Glencoe, Missouri;

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the sources give Kelly’s first name or exact identity, but he appears to be Thomas Cajetan Kelly, a Dominican priest then serving as the associate general secretary of the NCCB/USCC. In 1977, he became the general secretary and later auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington and finally, archbishop of Louisville. See Reese, *A Flock of Shepherds*, 90–92.

42. Bernard Law to Robert Monticello, November 19, 1975; John Maguire to Bernard Law, November 23, 1976, folder “CMC 1975–77,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA.

43. Ignatius Le-An-Dai to Donald Gallagher, September 23, 1976; Bernard Law to James Rausch, September 29, 1976; Bernard Law to Donald Gallagher, September 29, 1976, folder “CMC 1975–77,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA.

44. *Đức San Đông Công* 5, 28.

45. “Lược Sử Chi Dòng Đồng Công,” 132.



21 members of the La Salle Sisters to Fresno, California; and 10 sisters of the Lovers of the Holy Cross to Buffalo, New York. There remained 22 priests, 7 major seminarians, 18 minor seminarians, 1 religious brother, and 16 sisters without sponsorship. Among the not yet resettled, there were also dozens of members of the Incarnatio-Consecratio (IC) Institute (*Tu Hội Tân Hiến*), a secular institute of men, women, and their family members founded and headed by the priest Nguyễn Khắc Tước, better known by the name of Father Việt Anh. Similar to the founding of the CMC, Việt Anh began his group as a young priest in a Northern diocese only to move to the South in 1954. He then studied for several years in Switzerland before returning to South Vietnam to teach. With the permission of the bishop of Đà Lạt, he founded the institute in 1969.<sup>46</sup> Although the IC Institute was more loosely organized than the CMC, Việt Anh and other members wished to be resettled together.

The number of Vietnamese clergy and religious waiting to be resettled was smaller at the other camps. At Eglin Air Force Base, which had the fewest number of religious (3 priests, 4 seminarians, 5 sisters, and 1 brother), not all received sponsorship until the latter half of the summer. This suggests that most bishops and major superiors preferred to wait for direction and further communication from the USCC before offering sponsorship. The superior of a women's religious order, for example, forwarded the appeal of three refugee sisters to the executive director of CRS (who sent it to the USCC) because she was "not sure just what should be done."<sup>47</sup> This response illustrates uncertainty and caution due to the scale of refugee entrees and their abrupt arrival.

When bishops and superiors heard directly from Tracy or Rausch, most of them responded promptly and positively to the invitation for sponsorship. In June alone, at least nine dioceses and two religious orders expressed an interest in sponsoring one or more refugees. For instance, the Diocese of St. Augustine, whose boundaries encompassed Eglin Air Force Base, accepted the three remaining priests at the camp.<sup>48</sup> In July, at least twelve more dioceses and three religious orders wrote to the USCC of their willingness to sponsor clergy or religious.<sup>49</sup>

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46. Eugene Murray to Michael Sheehan, July 23, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 July," box 45, NCCBR. The background of the institute comes from Đỗ Hữu Nghiêm, "Linh Mục Việt Anh Nguyễn Khắc Tước" [The Reverend Việt Anh Nguyễn Khắc Tước] (May 30, 2004): [http://www.dunglac.info/index.php?m=module2&v=detailarticle&id=55&ia=5475#\\_ftn1](http://www.dunglac.info/index.php?m=module2&v=detailarticle&id=55&ia=5475#_ftn1). The name was eventually changed to the Incarnation Consecration Mission (ICM).

47. M. Victorine to Edward Swanstrom, June 6, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May-June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

48. Richard Burke to Edward Cummings, June 12, 1975; Paul Tanner to Robert Tracy, June 23, 1975, folder "VRPS 1975 May-June," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

49. These numbers are gathered from various documents in folders "VRPS 1975 July" and "VRPS 1975 Aug-Oct," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.





Vietnamese Dominican sisters and others at Eglin Air Force Base, near Valparaiso, Florida, 1975 (Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province, Houston, Texas).

The Archdiocese of New Orleans agreed to sponsor the seventy members of the IC Institute, providing two buildings, one for men and one for women, for temporary housing of the group. New Orleans Archbishop Philip Hannan sent representatives to Fort Chaffée, Fort Indiantown Gap, and Eglin Air Force Base to recruit seminarians for his diocese. By the fall, at least seventeen refugees were attending Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.<sup>50</sup> On a smaller scale, several other dioceses offered sponsorship of one or more seminarians. At least one CMC member and three IC Institute members at Fort Indiantown Gap decided to become seminarians for the local Diocese of Harrisburg.<sup>51</sup> The Maryknoll order sponsored ten seminarians by the fall.<sup>52</sup> In Iowa, the Divine Word Missionaries at Divine Word College created a “pre-

50. Philip Hannan to Joseph Bernardin, August 23, 1975; Eugene Murray to James Rausch, August 11, 1975; “Religious News Service, August 5, 1975”; “Report to the Budget Committee,” October 22, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

51. Unsigned handwritten notes (probably by Eugene Murray) dated August 1, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

52. James Rausch to Jean Jadot, August 5, 1975; Joseph Glynn to Michael Sheehan, September 9, 1975; “Report to the Budget Committee,” October 22, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

seminary” program focusing on English instruction primarily for minor seminarians from Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> Bishop James Hickey of the Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio, offered to “accept all or some of the refugee seminarians” into the Borromeo College Seminary program. Hickey promised to support them financially and allow them the choice to remain with the diocese after ordination, but it does not appear any seminarians affiliated with the Diocese of Cleveland.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, Hickey’s offer exemplifies the response from U.S. dioceses to support the continuity of studies and training of seminarians.

Except for a small number of Vietnamese clergy and religious who were not resettled (including eleven priests) by the end of October 1975, those resettled numbered over 600 (106 priests, 233 brothers, 155 sisters, 36 major seminarians, and 84 minor seminarians).<sup>55</sup> Except for two that moved to France and one to Belgium, the refugee priests were resettled in forty-three dioceses and archdioceses across seventeen states and the District of Columbia.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the year, and counting priests who had been in the U.S. before the fall of Saigon, the number of Vietnamese clergy rose to 145 priests in sixty-three dioceses and archdioceses in twenty-seven states plus Washington, D.C., and the territory of Guam.<sup>57</sup>

Nearly 200 women religious were successfully resettled by March 1976. This number included twenty-eight members of pontifical congregations, who had received sponsorship or direct support from their American counterparts. The largest of the pontifical groups was the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, which had three professed members and twelve novices. There were also seven Daughters of Charity who were scattered in five dioceses.<sup>58</sup> Among 153 members that belonged to ten diocesan congregations, the

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53. Ed Herberger to John Donaghey, September 1, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA. A number of dioceses and congregations in Vietnam established programs that enrolled teenagers who were interested in the priesthood or religious life. They could be as young as twelve years old. This background accounted for the presence of dozens of minor seminarians among the refugees. There was no follow-up on the minor seminarians, and it appears that most left the camps with their families before deciding whether to continue with preparation for the priesthood or religious life.

54. R.E. Bacher to Michael Sheehan, August 7, 1975; Michael Sheehan to R.E. Bacher, August 21, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

55. James Rausch to U.S. Bishops, October 29, 1975, folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

56. “Names and Addresses of Vietnamese Refugee Priests, October 24, 1975,” folder “VRPS 1975 Aug–Oct,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

57. “Names and Addresses of Vietnamese Refugee Priests, December 20, 1975,” folder “VRPS 1975 Nov–Dec,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

58. “Names and Addresses of Vietnamese Sisters, March 1976,” 1–9, folder “Ad Hoc Committee: Migration and Tourism: Vietnamese Religious: McGinnis, Sheila, SCMM 1976–79,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA. Folders under this heading will appear as “Sheila McGinnis” followed by the years.

Lovers of the Holy Cross made up the largest group at forty members, including twenty-seven women whose roots were in the Diocese of Phát Diêm and who were sponsored by several American women's congregations in the Dioceses of Erie and Buffalo. Thirty-six female members of the IC Institute, including three novices and thirteen postulants, were resettled.<sup>59</sup> By the end of 1976, updates and corrections raised the number to 204 Vietnamese women religious who had found new homes in America.<sup>60</sup> Similar to the men, the women were not necessarily resettled in areas with Vietnamese refugees but according to the availability of sponsoring dioceses and religious communities.

### **Toward the Incardination of Vietnamese Priests into U.S. Dioceses**

The USCC general secretary reported in early 1976 that all refugee religious, priests, and seminarians had been resettled, at least temporarily. The organization had followed the recommendation by Bishop Tracy and Father Murray to quickly resettle the refugees so they could learn English and adapt to the ways of their new country. Also, since there was little prospect for returning to Vietnam in the foreseeable future, the pastoral needs for an estimated 60,000 Vietnamese Catholic refugees were significant. As a result, the USCC began to assist in efforts at permanent resettlement of clergy and religious.<sup>61</sup>

A central component of this second phase was the incardination of refugee priests into dioceses: a matter urged and guided by the office of the apostolic delegate. In two letters, Archbishop Jean Jadot conveyed the recommendation from the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which oversaw the Vatican's work with refugees. Generally, according to Jadot, an ordinary would accept a refugee priest for three years ("probation"). During this time, the refugee priest would carry "the same obligations and rights of the Diocesan priests," yet also "seek to determine . . . the desire of their respective Ordinaries 'a quo' relative to their future." This arrangement allowed for eventual incardination in the same diocese if agreed upon by the priest and his new bishop. A priest could also transfer to another diocese during the three-year period if accepted by a new ordinary with the

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59. *Ibid.*, 10–28. Born between 1960 and 1966, eleven of thirty-six female members of the IC Institute are classified as "minor" on this list: that is, they were children of older members. For this reason, I do not count them among the 153 women religious.

60. "Names and Addresses of Vietnamese Sisters, December 1976," folder "Sheila McGinnis 1976–79," box 46, NCCBR, ACUA. Again, this figure does not count the "minor" members of the IC Institute.

61. John McCarthy to Michael Sheehan, January 6, 1976; James Rausch to U.S. Bishops, January 12, 1976, folder "VRPS 1976 Jan–Jun," box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

approval of the apostolic delegate. Lastly, the Congregation allowed the possibility that the refugee priests could return to their original dioceses in Vietnam “if at a later date this should prove to the advantage of the Church in Vietnam.” These recommendations also applied to priests and seminarians living or studying in the U.S. before 1975.<sup>62</sup>

Jadot’s letters demonstrate the Holy See’s recognition of the fluidity of the refugee situation as well as the uncertainty regarding postwar Vietnam. It sought the possibility of permanent resettlement so the refugees could adjust and better serve the American Church, yet it also left open the chance of return to Vietnam. The recommendations were well received among American bishops and Vietnamese priests. At least fifty dioceses and archdioceses offered contracts to the priests, mostly between February 1976 and August 1977.<sup>63</sup> An unspecified number of bishops also expressed to the apostolic delegate “a desire to incardinate these priests upon the expiration of the probation.”<sup>64</sup> Because many priests considered transfer to another diocese, it is not clear how many incardinated into the dioceses of their initial affiliation. Nonetheless, the willingness for probation and incardination among the bishops allowed for flexibility during a difficult and confusing period in the refugee priests’ lives, helping to ease the complex task of permanent resettlement.

### **Father Eugene Murray, Sister Sheila McGinnis, and Father Nguyễn Văn Tĩnh**

As part of this second phase of resettlement, the USCC instituted a series of visits to refugee religious, priests, and seminarians. Since Father Murray had visited all four camps during 1975, he was the logical choice to continue as liaison and principal visitor.<sup>65</sup> His visitation reports reveal a variety of reactions and adaptations during temporary resettlement. Expectedly, those most fluent in English found it easiest to find positions in ministry and reported being better adjusted. In Pittsburgh, for example, a Christian

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62. Jean Jadot to James Rausch, January 8, 1976 and February 12, 1976, folder “VRPS 1976 Jan–Jun,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

63. The number is gathered from folder “VRPS Diocesan Contracts 1976,” box 43, NCCBR, ACUA; folder “VRPS Diocesan Contracts 1977–79,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA. A fifty-first, the Diocese of Grand Rapids, contracted with the CMC to have one of its priests sent to Michigan to serve the Catholic refugee population.

64. Jean Jadot to Thomas Kelly, September 12, 1978, folder “VRPS Diocesan Contracts 1977–79,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA.

65. Murray also visited several religious priests of Chinese or Taiwanese origins who had come to South Vietnam and became refugees after the fall of Saigon. Perhaps because of this unique situation, their names do not appear on several lists of “names and addresses of Vietnamese refugee priests” that the USCC compiled during 1975–1976.

Brother who had taught French to junior and high school students in South Vietnam found similar employment at an American high school.<sup>66</sup> In the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, a Dominican sister who arrived in the U.S. with Vietnamese orphans became a teacher of Vietnamese children at a Catholic elementary school. In San Jose, California a member of the Daughters of Charity who spoke “excellent English” and was “picking up Spanish and Italian rapidly” became a counselor to patients at a Daughters of Charity-run hospital.<sup>67</sup> In dioceses with a large number of refugees, some priests and religious appeared to be satisfied or, at least, fully engaged with their ministries within newly-established Vietnamese apostolates.

Besides the CMC and the IC Institute, however, the majority of religious and priests had a difficult time adjusting to American life. In some cases, sponsorships isolated refugee religious, and it became challenging to reassemble their communities. The absence of superiors further contributed to the challenge of staying together as individual members decided to move away from others. In Long Island, for example, three Lovers of the Holy Cross from the Vinh Diocese resided at two locations. At the invitation of a refugee priest in Chicago, however, two of them moved to Illinois while the third preferred to stay in New York. “The lines of authority,” noted Murray, “are very vague.”<sup>68</sup> The combination of sudden exile and the experience of the U.S. as an alien society led to depression among many priests and religious. One priest’s depression, for instance, was severe enough to have raised the concern of a fellow refugee priest; another was recovering from a mental breakdown when Murray visited.<sup>69</sup> Difficulty in adjustment led some to consider far-away possibilities: one priest, for example, felt “discouraged” about the current situation enough to think about moving to “a South American apostolate as a missionary.”<sup>70</sup>

Two months after Murray began his visits, the USCC hired Sister Sheila McGinnis, a member of the Medical Mission Sisters, to be “special consultant” among the refugee women religious. Sister McGinnis had spent eight years in South Vietnam. She worked for the USCC at Camp Chaffee and then

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66. Memo by Eugene Murray, November 15, 1976, folder “VRPS Murray 1976 July–Dec,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA. The memos are cited by date. When two or more memos are from the same date, the citation includes the name of the person(s) being visited.

67. Eugene Murray to Michael Sheehan, March 3, 1976 and March 26, 1976, folder “VRPS Murray 1976 Jan–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

68. Memo by Eugene Murray, July 7, 1976, folder “VRPS Murray 1976 July–Dec,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

69. Memos by Eugene Murray, June 15 and June 27, 1976 (on Pham Dac Bang), folder “VRPS Murray 1976 Jan–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.

70. Memo by Eugene Murray, July 2, 1976 (on Tran Binh Trong), folder “VRPS Murray 1976 Jan–June,” box 45, NCCBR, ACUA.





**A group of Dominicans resettled initially in Connecticut before moving to Texas in 1977 (Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province, Houston, Texas).**

for the resettlement program of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.<sup>71</sup> Some of McGinnis' early findings, including the desire of individual priests and religious to start new religious communities, indicate a heightened combination of hope, grief, and fear among the refugees. Similar to Murray, she found that some women religious were willing to move and work with refugee priests: a fact that suggests isolation on the part of each. Climate also impacted the relocation of some women religious. In June 1977, for instance, most of the Dominican sisters that initially resettled in Waterbury, Connecticut moved to Houston, partially due to New England's cold weather.<sup>72</sup>

McGinnis found that the women religious generally preferred to "stay independent" rather than join either another Vietnamese or an American community.<sup>73</sup> Although the Holy See's Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples had recommended the organization of different groups among the Lovers of the Holy Cross under one rule and superior, McGinnis' finding likely contributed to the continuation of the status quo.<sup>74</sup> Indeed,

71. James Rausch to Jean Jadot, April 26, 1976; James Rausch to Sheila McGinnis, April 26, 1976, folder "Sheila McGinnis 1976-79," box 46, NCCRB, ACUA.

72. Sheila McGinnis to Joseph Charron, June 30, 1976 (on Waterbury Dominicans), folder "Sheila McGinnis 1976-79," box 46, NCCRB; "Our Province History," Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province: <https://houstondominicans.org/our-province-history>.

73. Sheila McGinnis to Robert Monticello, July 15, 1976, folder "Sheila McGinnis 1976-79," box 46, NCCRB, ACUA.

74. The recommendation is found in Jean Jadot to James Rausch, March 13, 1976, folder "Sheila McGinnis 1976-79," box 46, NCCRB, ACUA.



the pattern toward independence continued a year later when McGinnis reported that “there is very little movement towards affiliation with larger communities, or gatherings together in groups among themselves.” She added, “There is however a deep longing to return home.”<sup>75</sup>

McGinnis’ observation of the desire to return to Vietnam aligns with recent research about the experience of Vietnamese American Catholics in the 1970s and 1980s. During the first years of resettlement, Vietnamese religious, priests, and seminarians continued to experience the shock and grief of loss and separation from their families and original communities. Having identified themselves among an intensely nationalist and anticommunist people, they now considered themselves exiles from Vietnam rather than aspirants to be American. They adopted the identity of an exilic people living in an alien land, hoping against hope for a return to a communist-free Vietnam. At the same time, they felt threatened by the more materialistic American society and strove to keep their heritage alive. In addition to the sorrow of loss and separation, they felt an urgency to preserve their nationalist past and their fervently Catholic experience.<sup>76</sup>

The desire for preservation manifested itself in a desire to establish Vietnamese parishes, societies, and publications among the refugee community. In February 1977, Father Việt Châu and associates in New Orleans published the first issue of *Dân Chúa* [People of God]. In December 1977, the CMC began the diasporic edition of its former monthly, *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* [Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart]. The small-scale publication of newsletters had existed among the Catholic refugees, but the appearance of these magazines marked the start of a more developed phase of the refugee Catholic ethnic press. Even though contributors to the magazines included many lay refugees, the fact that legal ownership of the publications belonged to religious priests and brothers indicates their crucial role among newly-formed Vietnamese Catholic communities in America.

At the end of 1976, Father Eugene Murray completed his work for the USCC and returned to Taiwan for an assignment with Maryknoll. At his recommendation, the USCC contacted Father Nguyễn Văn Tịnh, a refugee priest then working in Mountain View, California under the sponsorship of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, and invited him to serve as the liaison.

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75. Sheila McGinnis to Robert Charron, April 27, 1977, folder “Sheila McGinnis 1976–79,” box 46, NCCRB, ACUA.

76. On the overall effect of the fall of Saigon on the refugees, see Tuan Hoang, “From Reeducation Camps to Little Saigons: Historicizing Vietnamese Diasporic Anticommunism,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 2 (2016): 59–66. On its effect on Catholic refugees, see Hoang, “Ultramontanist, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon,” 21–36.

Tĩnh had studied in Italy, France, and West Germany, where he acquired a doctorate in physics, before returning to South Vietnam to teach. Fluent in English, he was also elected chair of the Community of Vietnamese Clergy and Religious in America (CVCRA). In March 1977, he agreed to serve for a period of six months, which was later extended to 1979.

Besides giving stability to the role, Tĩnh offered inside knowledge about a host of refugee issues and needs. They ranged from the need for Vietnamese-language missals, Bibles, and prayer books; to the desire for Vietnamese “religious centers” throughout the U.S.; to the problem of loneliness among many priests, including some who did not feel that they were accepted by their American confreres.<sup>77</sup> Within the CVCRA, Tĩnh coordinated its reorganization into six geographical regions. He resumed the regular publication of a newsletter that Father Việt Châu had begun in 1975 but discontinued it after three issues due to new obligations. During Tĩnh’s tenure, the CVCRA played a significant role in forming the Federation of Vietnamese Catholics in the USA, a national organization that remains in existence. In different capacities, he participated actively in critical local issues related to refugees. For instance, he mediated between the Diocese of Beaumont, Texas, and the refugee priest Trần Văn Khoát who faced canonical suspension for defying the ordinary’s directives on Khoát’s self-created Catholic community. Tĩnh also participated as a member of a committee discussing the future of the La Salle Sisters in Fresno, California. His recommendation led to the relocation of this community to San Jose, where it remains.<sup>78</sup> Many factors contributed to the permanent resettlement of Vietnamese priests and religious including the stability and knowledge that Tĩnh offered in his role as liaison.

## Conclusion

The story of Vietnamese Catholic resettlement thus far has focused on the perspective of the U.S. Church, largely utilizing archival materials of the USCC. The archival record demonstrates the centrality of the USCC and its cooperation with dioceses, religious orders, and the office of the apostolic delegate toward speedy resettlement of refugee religious, priests, and seminarians. This is not to say that the resettlement was free of issues, including problems related to race, class, and cultural adaptation. Nonetheless, the rel-

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77. Nguyen Van Tinh, “The Vietnamese Priests in USA,” November 3, 1977; Joseph Charron to Jean Jadot, March 15, 1977, folder “Vietnamese Priests: Nguyen Van Tinh 1976–77,” box 46, NCCBR, ACUA.

78. “Sơ Lược Lịch Sử Nữ La San tại Mỹ” [A Brief History of the La Salle Sisters in the U.S.] (no date), La San: <http://www.lasan.org/hoiky-journal/hoiky2/phanphu.htm>.

atively quick speed of resettlement marked a significant first step toward the permanent formation of Vietnamese Catholic communities in America. The next step, much of which occurred at the initiative of the refugees, was an intense effort to preserve their nationalist and Catholic heritage in their new society. Like other refugees, they believed they would be separated forever from Vietnam. This grim outlook led to their desire to replicate and maintain their heritage, including encouragement and investment to foster vocations to assure sufficient priests and religious to lead their communities and preserve the Vietnamese Catholic culture in the diaspora. Due to refugees' painful experiences of loss and separation, decades would elapse before Vietnamese refugees, including Catholic religious, priests, and seminarians, shifted from an exilic identity to a transnational one that characterizes much of the Vietnamese American Catholic experience today. Additional research will necessarily take into account these Vietnamese voices.

Future research will also be aided by a comparison to Filipino American and Korean American Catholics. The largest of all Asian American Catholic groups, Filipinos also have an extended history of immigration that dates back to the late nineteenth century. By 2015, there were over 800 Filipino American priests, a number comparable to (if not smaller than) the number of priests among Vietnamese Americans.<sup>79</sup> It is significant too that Dominic Mai Thanh Luong became the first Vietnamese American bishop in 2003, one year before Oscar Solis became the first Filipino American bishop. A similar comparison may be made to Korean American Catholics. Besides having a somewhat longer history of immigration than the Vietnamese, Koreans came to the U.S. as immigrants and not as refugees, yet the majority of the priests that have served in Korean American Catholic communities do not come from within these communities. Instead, they are "on loan" from dioceses in South Korea and, therefore, serve these communities only temporarily.<sup>80</sup>

In comparison, Vietnamese Catholic refugees were aided by the many refugee clergy and religious who accompanied them to the United States after the fall of Saigon. Two-thirds of those priests were between 30 and 45 years old, while another quarter were 46 to 55 years old, suggesting the possibility of a sustained role in the communities which they formed and

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79. Sister Myrna Tordillo, MSCS, "What Every Vocation Director Should Know about Filipino Families," *Horizon* (Fall 2015): 23.

80. Simon C. Kim, "A Lost Generation of Korean American Catholics: Immigrant Issues in the Transmission of Faith," in Simon C. Kim and Francis Daeshin Kim, eds., *Reconciling Cultures and Generations: Reflections on Today's Church by Korean American Catholics* (Chicago: Paul Bechtold Library Publications, 2018), 98–114. This situation is very different from Korean American Protestant communities whose pastors usually come from within.

joined.<sup>81</sup> During and after the initial shock of adjustment, this relatively young group provided long-term leadership among Catholic refugee communities throughout the U.S. Notwithstanding issues that accompanied resettlement, the strong effort by the U.S. Church toward assisting with resettlement helped to bring a degree of order amidst the most turbulent times of the refugees' lives. In turn, the exilic experience prompted the Catholic refugees to encourage and support the young in the pursuit of the priesthood and religious life. Many large- and medium-sized communities, for example, reconstituted the organization Eucharistic Youths (*Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể*) partially in order to encourage Catholic teenagers towards a religious vocation. The magazines, *Dân Chúa* and *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ*, frequently promoted male and female religious congregations and often included news about them. These publications from the diasporic press joyfully publicized and praised occasions of ordination and vow ceremonies. The root of this communal support came from the Vietnamese tradition of honoring and elevating the priesthood and religious life. The situation following the fall of Saigon further fueled the fear of cultural loss among the refugees. In return, they actively and urgently promoted vocations for the preservation of Vietnamese tradition and faith while they adjusted to new and challenging realities in the United States.

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81. Estimates from Nguyen Van Tinh, "The Vietnamese Priests in USA."