



# Getting to know Fr. Joseph-Quốc Thiện Vương



**Tell a little about your childhood/family/origin (e.g. siblings, parents, family, church, what were some experiences growing up?):**

I was born in Vietnam into a family that was typically Catholic. I am the 3rd in a family with 7 children. In 1954 my family left their homeland and migrated to South Vietnam when Communism split the country and religious quarantines were enforced. Most of my family now resides in the United States, however my sister is still in Vietnam with her family awaiting a sponsorship.

During my time in South Vietnam, my family attended Doc Mo Parish, where many displaced Catholics attended and resided. We lived at the parish, located 75 miles north of Saigon, where we gathered in secret for Catechetical training as the local government did not allow Formation gatherings. My knowledge of faith in the early part of my life came from memorizing, since I did not know how to read until I was 10 years old. The parish had two morning masses, one at 3:30am for adults who would then go to work in the field by 6am and a second at 4:30am for youngsters, and it is still going on to this day. Most of my relatives still live in Doc Mo.

In 1984, my family was arrested and we were separated from our father because of his involvement with the South Vietnamese Army. My father was held for 6 years in prison.

My family spent 4 years at the Galang Refugee Camp, and it shaped me to be who I am today. Unlike those times in Vietnam, I was now able to practice my faith freely. We were not able to go off the camp or to do much of anything, but I kept up my daily routine with prayer and trust in God. I was able to attend church daily and in the evening a group of us would come to pray before a statue of Mary that stood on a boat in the camp.

In 1989, myself and 4 of my siblings escaped the country and were able to come to the United States. (My father followed later.) I became an American citizen in 1999.

## **Favorite pastime?**

Being able to practice our faith freely. After many years under religious restriction and scrutiny, and the hardship experiences of being interned in a refugee camp, freely practicing our faith is a continuing joy.

## **Do you enjoy sports? (watching, playing, etc....)**

I used to play soccer (football) during my childhood, but once I twisted my ankle and I don't have as much interest in sports. These days, from time to time, I will watch sports on television, such as a final game of football.

## **Do enjoy being out-and-about or are you more of a homebody?**

I am not an outgoing person. I do, from time to time, like being out with friends. I have friends who live in many places, nationally and internationally, and we do get together as time allows.

### **Favorite TV show(s)**

The show I watched for a long time was "Barney and Friends" on channel 2, but that was 20 years ago. In the last 17 years, I rarely watch TV. "The Three Stooges" is my favorite all-time show. These days, I may watch some current news on YouTube.

### **Favorite Movie(s)**

The Three Stooges, Forest Gump

### **Favorite music (secular and sacred)**

I would say the Sacred music and some Vietnamese country songs. I also like Karaoke sometimes with friends.

### **Favorite food(s)**

I fix my own food most of the time since I am diabetic.

### **What do you do to unwind? (movies, reading, etc.)**

Like I did during the time I was confined in the refugee camp, I may chant a sacred song that will set me at peace. The Prayer of St. Francis is my favorite song. I sew a little bit to fix my clothes. I also like to find a quotation from the bible that may calm me down.

### **Where is your favorite place in the world? In MN?**

I do not have a favorite place but love to travel when I have the opportunity.

### **Where is a place you would love to travel?**

Wherever my relatives and friends may settle.

### **Tell us about your Faith Journey and calling to Priesthood**

My childhood was spent at Doc Mo parish until I was 12 years of age.

- During my childhood, I was not allowed to be at church until the time I received First Holy Communion, at age 7. I was surprised by how the priest celebrated the Holy Mass with his hands extended during prayers. At church it seemed like a privilege because only the presider was allowed to stretch out his hands and pray. I memorized the Eucharistic prayer at an early age.

- While in Vietnam, under Communist Party control, none of us were allowed to express our desire to be a priest. I knew I wanted to be a priest, but because my family was forced to move around seeking opportunity to escape, it was impossible to discern priestly life. When I left Vietnam to go to the Refugee Camp, the calling was more real.

- In 1993 I then was able to come to the USA. We rented a house in Columbia Heights where I attended Immaculate Conception Church. (The Immaculate Conception is the patron of my parish in Vietnam and it is my belief Mary has been my constant protector.) I spent 3 months at an English as a Second Language (ESL) center in Coon Rapids and was accepted into Columbia Heights High School at the age of 21 into 10th grade and was able to graduate in 1996 from Fridley High School. I attended the U of M in the Twins Cities and was admitted to St. John Vianney College Seminary in 1997. After this I attended Cursillo Retreat during July 1997.

- I found myself at peace during my priestly formation and I believe my vocation to holiness is to serve others in very special ministries that God has chosen for me. After 10 years in formation, the Holy Mother church ordained me to be the priest of Christ of the faithful. My priestly life is truly blessed by God and Our Blessed Virgin.

- My name is Quốc Thiện Vương. In Vietnamese it is Vương Thiện Quốc. For the Vietnamese, the last name is first and the first name is last. At the time of baptism, traditionally a baby is given a saint name as his/her baptismal name and patron saint name. I was given Joseph as my baptismal patron saint name. When I became an American citizen, I added Joseph as part of my first name and today my legal name is Joseph-Quoc Thien Vuong. You may call me Joseph since Quốc is hard to pronounce for those who do not know Vietnamese. (Since Mary is truly my protector, in May 2007 prior to my ordination to the priesthood, I dedicated my life to the care of our Blessed Virgin Mary and took Her name as my second patron. So, some may know my name as Father JosephMary or in Vietnamese Cha GiuseMaria. Indeed, Joseph and Mary are my two patron saints.)

**What are some of your pet peeves (e.g. loud chewing, showing up late, etc....)**

I am sensitive to being mistreated or treated inhumanly. We were treated as traitors for many years in Vietnam under Communism. I witnessed many of my friends commit suicide due to hopelessness in the refugee camp. Here, in this great country, I often heard stories that people are mistreated by our institutional ideology.

**What makes you laugh? (e.g. heady conversation, puns)**

I do tell jokes.

**What dreams do you have for your Ministry at St. Gerard's?**

- To form the faithful under God's care
- To pray with the faithful and to lead them to Christ Jesus
- To do my best that the faithful may reach heaven as our eternal home.

**What are your favorite ways to pray?**

'Those who sing pray twice'. I like to sing from time to time. I value and believe that my life is like a song that praises God. I will and must sing as my life is blessed until I depart. I see that God generously gives each human being tremendous gifts. We must use them as God-given gifts for mankind.

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