



CHRISTIAN
LIFE
COMMUNITY®

Harvest

Vol. 39, No.4

Winter 2006

You have given all to me...



now I return it.

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Vol. 39, No.4, 2006

Christian Life Community® Harvest (USPS 985-900):
ISSN-0739-6422) is published quarterly by the
National Christian Life Community® of the United
States of America, 3601 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis,
MO 63108

Subscriptions are \$24 per year USA; \$28 foreign,
\$34 foreign air mail.

POSTMASTER: Send all changes of address to
Christian Life Community® Harvest, 3601 Lindell
Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63108.

Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, Missouri

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

*“You have given all to me
...now I return it.”*

The time period when an old year ends and a new one begins gives us a really great opportunity to look at our lives in retrospect. How have we, as members of Christian Life Community®, spent our time and talents? Do we smugly say, “Well, I am doing such and such, my schedule is full. I try to praise, reverence and serve God in my life. I am grateful for what I have. I guess I am doing my share to further the Kingdom.”

But how do we really attempt to make some ‘return’ for what has been given so freely? What a special gift we have received through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises and the opportunity to attempt to ‘live’ our Ignatian Spirituality in daily life; knowing that, in spite of our unworthiness, we are ever-blessed with a sense of the Great Love that assists and awaits us at every turn in our daily journeys. Do we feel enveloped by that Love? Could anyone truly merit this wonder? How can we possibly live so that each choice we make is one that echoes love and an expectation that we are trying to incorporate a sense of God’s will in our choices as well as our deeds? Are we cognizant of our call to always be geared to choosing those words, decisions and actions which will foster ‘the greater glory of God in our world’?

When we pause to pray or sing a version of the Suscipe of St. Ignatius, do we envision it as an unattainably lofty ideal or does it become for us a daily initiative? Do we really ask the Lord to fill our ‘memory, understanding, entire will’ so that we will be always available (disponability) to not only seek, but to *do* the will of God in each choice we make?

If so, it stands to reason that we will be ever-sensitive to what needs to be done—the search for and practice of the *magis*. Do we allow ourselves to look for the ‘more’ in thought as well as concrete instances?

And when we arrive at the end of that beautiful prayer, just how do we intend to ‘return’ the *all* that has been given?

Perhaps then we’d find...

...a greater sense of gratitude for all we have been given
...how much more completely would we find ourselves
in His presence,
...how much more we would be open to His will, rather
than seeking confirmation of our own desires
...how many words would *not* cross our lips
...how many times a no or maybe would become a hearty
yes, or why not
...how more willingly would we venture outside of our
comfort zone, seeking the *magis*
...how much more loving service would we give to others?

All for the greater glory of God!

Isn’t that what we, as members of Christian Life Community®, are all about?

Our issue’s authors have provided us with some wonderful thoughts on this theme of making some kind of ‘return’ for all that we have received.

“How do I respond as the debtor that I am?”

“Dear God, how are you calling me to penetrate the human condition around me so that You can flow through me into it?”

“We help each other to discover how best to be Christ in our modern world.

“Indeed, in receiving what I was giving back to Him, the Lord gave back to me even more than I could ever imagine.

“There is a need and a hunger for our CLC way of life.

“Opening up my life to serve others was very much a calling.

“As God continues to give us God’s ALL in Christ Jesus, one essential ‘ventana’ (window) into our grateful response of serving God is the service of **sharing**... returning our ALL by living the good news generously with and for others, especially those sisters and brothers most in need, not necessarily in **DOING** more, but serving better and more lovingly.”



Dolores Celentano

A.M.D.G.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

For the Greater Glory of God

An Introduction to Mustard Seeds CLC

Kim-Anh Vu

Mustard Seeds (Hat Cai in Vietnamese) is a Dong Hanh CLC group that has been formed since 1985 within the campus grounds of the University of California, Irvine. The idea of having a Dong-Hanh group within a university originated with a few students attending a weekend retreat that was adapted from The Spiritual Exercises by Fr. Julian Elizalde, S.J., who was a Spanish Jesuit who could speak Vietnamese fluently. For more than twenty years, this group continues to have an active presence within the Catholic community of the university. Embracing the Ignatian spirit, they meet weekly to pray and to live community life, as well as to help each other integrate different aspects of their busy student lives. They participate in service projects in Tijuana, Mexico, and music ministry on campus, as well as Dong-Hanh activities.

Recently, the members of Mustard Seeds were invited to prepare a retreat for young children ranging in age from six to fifteen, by the parents of the Dong-Hanh Christian Life Community®. It was an invitation that followed—CLC, Our Way of Proceeding. Five members were missioned from the group to carry out the retreat with the full support from the group as well as from the Southwest Dong-Hanh Region.

It was a collaborative effort of the parents and the students to bring the S.E.E.D. Retreat to the children. This came from the many months and years of the parents asking the questions: “How do we begin introducing the Spiritual Exercises to our young children as they are also considered members of our family community? How do we introduce to our children a personal God Who loves and cares for us unconditionally?”

Many were the questions that led us to the first S.E.E.D. retreat on September 20-22, 2006, in Flagstaff, Arizona, amidst the pines and ponderosa trees. There were twenty-two children and five retreat leaders, with the support of all the parents and one priest.

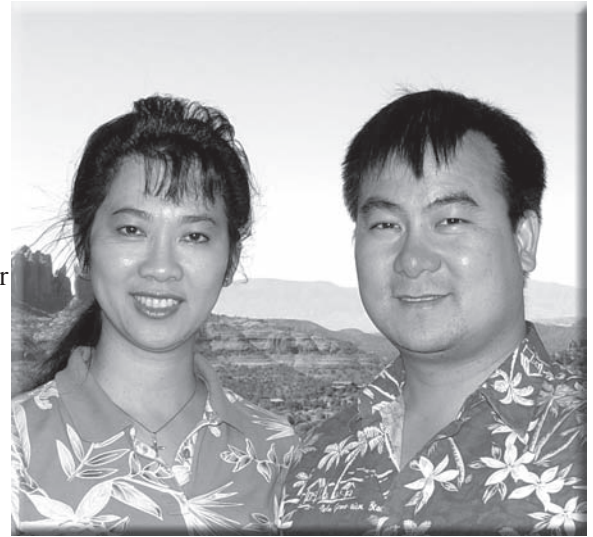
Those were wonderful days of blessings. Beginning with orientation, the children were led into the retreat with the dynamics of different activities: the treasure hunt; interviewing the saints; learning about God, each other and self in nature, morning prayer with music and songs, evening Examen with some quiet moments for gratefulness; and entertainment night where the parents, children and retreat leaders put together their talents in skits, dance and music. The parents marveled at the children’s ability to translate biblical messages into today’s circumstances. The children laughed at their parents’ silliness. We all enjoyed God’s presence among us. Truly, we were living the Ignatian CLC Way of Life –spirituality, community and mission.

Upon reflection, the Lord has blessed the Mustard Seeds with so much during the last twenty years. We were given a spirituality that has brought us close to God and to each other. We found ‘home,’ where we truly belong. In service to each other and the community at large, we understood more deeply the meaning of our lives. I was once a Mustard Seed, when it started in 1985. How the Lord labors to form and guide the group! How He has journeyed with us thus far to provide all of our needs and more!

“Take, Lord, receive...

You have given all to me, now I return it.”

When I graduated and it was time to leave the Mustard Seeds, I prayed this prayer. I did not know then that twenty years later, it would be the Mustard Seeds’ members who would be giving a retreat for our very own children. Indeed, in receiving what I was giving back to



Kim-Anh Vu is Vice-President of Dong-Hanh CLC. She and her husband Hung are members of Nazareth DH-CLC Community in Phoenix, Arizona.

Both Kim and Hung are active in Family Ministry for Dong-Hanh and the Diocese of Phoenix. They are working to develop a formation program for the Dong-Hanh way of life in the context of the family.

The web site for Dong-Hanh (Vietnamese CLC) is:
<http://www.donghanh.org/main/trangchinh.htm>

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A Special Retreat —

Search
Embark
Experience
Develop

Frank Vuong



Frank Vuong is a senior at University of California at Irvine.

His field of study is Biology/English.

He has been a member of Mustard Seeds/Hat Cai since his Freshman year of college.

His future plans include medical school, becoming a doctor and starting a family practice.

His interests include photography and being an active member of Hat Cai.

Search. There are many instances in life in which we actively search for meaning, a purpose given only by God. This search for truth is not limited to any age group nor is it limited to any location or time. About one month ago, six young adults who normally would be studying for college exams, went out on a journey to lead a retreat for children of all ages. Six young adults who were inexperienced in leading any sort of spiritual retreat, left Southern California to reach out to another group in Arizona. This retreat team, consisting of Anthony Pham, Mark Pham, Steven Nguyen, Thu Nguyen, Vinh Tran and Frank Vuong, answered God's calling to support and be supported by a community of fellow Christians, nhóm Nazaret. The search to see God in a new light in our lives had only begun.

Embark. This retreat for children was truly a journey, and God was definitely the guide. It all started with an invitation sent to nhóm Hạt Cải, asking if leading a retreat for children would be of interest. Upon receiving this invitation, the retreat team soon was established after discerning whether or not it was God's calling for the individuals who desired to take up this opportunity. We had countless meetings and numerous late nights when the retreat team would go over every single detail of the retreat. To be honest, we had no idea what we were getting into. None of us had ever led a full retreat in our lives. Yet, we found trust, hope, faith and guidance through God as we kept reminding ourselves that we were doing this for Him. Every disagreement we had in our planning process was settled through the thought of the smiles on each child's face and we hadn't even met them yet. The planning process of retreat took us almost two months. We had to find time in our busy schedules that consisted of school, exams, studying and work. The planning and preparation never ceased until the minutes leading up to the retreatant's arrival time. Although the planning seemed stressful, we had so much fun bonding with each other and getting each other more excited as we thought about the children. I remember at one point we had started counting down the days, minutes, and seconds left until the start of the retreat. Through love, faith, and putting it all into action, we embarked on this journey to allow the children of nhóm Nazaret to embrace and encounter God in a whole other way.

Experience. After a long drive from Southern California to the retreat site in Flagstaff, Arizona, we found ourselves anxious and excited. I remember how the retreat team and I were preparing the meeting room before the retreat officially started. Each one of the retreat leaders was soon ambushed by remarkably energetic little people, the children. We were stormed by children who had met us for only the first time, yet began to hug and embrace us as older brothers and a sister in Christ. We were hoping to give the parents and children a warm welcome, yet ironically we were the ones who were even more warmly welcomed. At that moment, I saw God in the smiles on each child's face. I saw their eagerness to spend time with the Lord through praise, worship, community time and faith-sharing. I saw God also in the parents as they placed their entire trust and faith in the retreat leaders. I had never experienced so much support from people I hardly knew. We all were experiencing God's graces this retreat. We were witnessing mountains being moved with prayer.

Develop. Throughout the retreat we focused on introducing God to the children through different aspects. We helped reconnect the retreatants with God through experiencing one another as friends and ultimately as a family in Christ. We played activities that would help the children see God in nature and in other people. One specific activity we had was painting a scene of nature. Each child would look around at the beautiful pine trees that

surrounded us and appreciate God's work of art through making his/her own work of art in the form of paintings. Another activity was the scavenger hunt. All the retreatants were separated into random groups in which they would work as a team to find clues that would lead them to a retreat leader. Each retreat leader dressed up as a saint for this game. The retreatants had an awesome time finding the retreat leaders dressed as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernadette, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Peter, hiding around in the forest as they waited to tell their stories of their wonderful journeys of faith. We also had discussions and presentations on various topics. We explored what The Sign of the Cross meant and why we do it. The children found Who God is to them as the Heavenly Father. We discussed with the children the Catholic belief of the Holy Trinity. Last but not least, we helped them to find their place of comfort in a community, and they actually built real communities—out of cardboard! This retreat was jam-packed full of activities, games, and presentations that were all centered around God in a way that would help develop the children's spirituality.

S.E.E.D. Looking back now, I can see how it was only through God's grace that this retreat experience happened. Through the unsurpassed support from the parents, the incomparable participation and enthusiasm of the children, and the deep passion of the retreat leaders, this retreat was a dream come true for all of us. Never had I thought I would be privileged enough to lead a retreat like this at my age. This certainly was a true community experience that allowed me to not only bond with children but the adults as well. The S.E.E.D. Retreat 2006 was definitely an irreplaceable experience that bridged the gaps between generations, age groups and spiritual lifestyles. I am honored to say that during those three days of searching, embarking, experiencing and developing our relationship with Jesus, I know that this truly was an act of building God's community.

Lord, You are the planter, and I am the seed. Amen. ☩



*“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed,
you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from
here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be
impossible for you.”*

— Matthew 17:20

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Him, the Lord gave back to me even more than I could imagine. His love and grace continue to overflow into the lives of our children, gifting them and blessing them. Yes, He has given back to us so much more than what we have offered to Him. Indeed, ‘our cups were overflowed’ when we witnessed the joy and peace in the smiles of our children. We thank God deeply for sowing seeds of love in their hearts. May He continue to *receive* them and give them back to the world with hearts anew more and more each day. ☩

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