

Most Reverend Dominic Dinh Mai Luong, D.d., Auxiliary Bishop of Orange, Passes into Eternal Life

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The Most Rev. Dominic Dinh Mai Luong, D.D., Bishop Emeritus for the Diocese of Orange, passed away December 6, 2017 at 77 years old surrounded by friends, family and brother priests. Bishop Luong, will be remembered as the first native-born Vietnamese Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States and for his passionate ministry helping to guide the faith journey of all Catholics in Orange County, Calif. The young seminarian, who at 16 years old was sent from Vietnam to the United States to continue his formation as a priest, would ultimately be ordained a bishop. His appointment by Pope John Paul II to the office of episcopacy on April 25, 2003, was reflective of the enormous growth of the Catholic Church in Orange County and, more specifically, the burgeoning Vietnamese Catholic community in the region in need of a shepherd on the hierarchical level. The words on his coat of arms summarized his journey geographically and spiritually: 'You are Strangers and Aliens No Longer.' Then-retired Bishop Norman McFarland said of Bishop Luong's appointment at the time: "This is a happening of major historical significance and brings the greatest joy to all." Bishop Luong, who retired in 2015, remained active in the Church while based at St. Bonaventure Church in Huntington Beach, CA – a parish with a strong Vietnamese contingent. He told *OC Catholic* in a recent interview that he liked "to keep in contact with my people." Bishop Luong had been writing a book, "Mary of Vietnam," a closer look at the numerous places the Blessed Mother has appeared in the country. He was also involved in a monthly *Lectio Divina* ['Divine Reading'] at St. Bonaventure. Dominic Dinh Mai Luong was born on December 20, 1940, in Minh Cuong – about 50 miles from Hanoi – in the Province of Bui Chu in North Vietnam. He was the second youngest of the 11 children of Dominic Mai Ngoc Vy and Maria Pham (Khuou). His father was an official primarily involved in real estate transactions. The family, devout Catholics, belonged to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish. Unfortunately, because of the dangerous political instability plaguing the country, the family was forced to move a number of times. Young Dominic received a quality elementary education from a French-Vietnamese school. He attended secondary school at Trung Linh where he and a number of other students comprised the junior Seminary of Ho Ngoc Can for the Diocese of Bui Chu. In 1956 Dominic's bishop sent him to the United States to continue his formation for the priesthood. Of course, this meant a long, difficult separation from his family and his country. He would not be able to return home until 1979. He was just sixteen years old. After passing comprehensive studies testing by the State of New York, he studied for six years at the Diocesan Preparatory Seminary in Buffalo. After that, he went on to Saint Bernard's Major Seminary in Rochester, New York. Besides the expected studies in philosophy, scripture, and theology, he also took science classes during summer vacations. On May 21, 1966, Bishop James A. McNulty ordained Dominic Mai Luong to the priesthood for the Diocese of Da Nang at the Basilica of Our Lady of Victory in Lackawanna, New York. Of course, he was unable to return to his home diocese because of the war raging in Vietnam at that time. Following his ordination, Father Luong completed his formal science studies, adding to a bachelor in physics, master's degrees in biology and in psychology. He then returned to the junior seminary in Buffalo where he taught biology and also served as a chaplain to Saint Francis Hospital. For a time he also was associate pastor at Saint Louis Parish in Buffalo. Father Luong's experience as a Vietnamese trained for the priesthood in America providentially suited him to be a leader when, at the fall of South Vietnam, many refugees came to the United States. A large portion of them went to the New Orleans area where Archbishop worked to help resettle them. He persuaded Father Luong, whom he met visiting in a refugee camp, to move to New

Orleans and become Director of the Archdiocesan Vietnamese Apostolate. He accepted and served in this capacity from 1976 to 1983, when he became the Founding Pastor of Mary, Queen of Vietnam Parish. On the national level, Father Luong served as the Director of the National Center for the Vietnamese Apostolate. As the U.S. Conference of Bishops' Director of Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees, he traveled throughout the country assisting various Vietnamese immigrant groups. Because of this important work, Pope John Paul II honored him with the title of Monsignor. Although Vietnamese immigrants settled in many places around the country, another very large concentration made their home in Southern California, principally in Orange County. The Vatican was aware of this circumstance, and so, when Bishop Brown petitioned for a second auxiliary bishop to assist him in his growing diocese, Pope John Paul II, on April 25, 2003, appointed Monsignor Dominic Mai Luong Titular Bishop of Cebaredes and Auxiliary Bishop of Orange. He was to be the first native-born Vietnamese Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States. Bishop Brown welcomed him and in his formal statement to the media noted: "Not only is he a person with deep spirituality and dedicated heart, but he also possesses well-honed leadership skills that will be very useful in his ministry here." For his part, Bishop-elect Luong acknowledged: "By calling me the first Vietnamese priest to the office of episcopacy, His Holiness in particular, and the Church in the United States in general, recognize the many contributions with which 400,000 Vietnamese Catholics, over 600 priests, and more than 500 religious have enriched the Church in the United States, especially in the area of vocations to the priesthood and religious life."

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