



Sister Marie Juliette Nguyen
July 29, 1920 ~ February 21, 2022

“The Lord is close to the broken hearted.”

Born in Hue Vietnam on July 29, 1920, Sister Marie Juliette was baptized Thi Oanh Nguyen. Her father was Van Do Nguyen. He was born in Quang Thi Vietnam, and was an officer in the French Governor’s troops in Vietnam. Sister’s mother was Ho Thi Tuyen and she was born in Phnoc Qua Vietnam. Siblings include Huong Nhan Nguyen, Kham Nguyen and De Van Nguyen. In all there were seven children, three died before Sister.

Sister Marie Juliette entered the Daughters of Mary Immaculate on February 10, 1935. She received the habit of the Daughters on August 5, 1939, made first vows on August 5, 1941, and pronounced her final vows on August 5, 1947.

In addition to her native language of Vietnamese, Sister spoke French and English. Her apostolic service included teaching school in Vietnam. Later Sister assumed the responsibility for the Sisters in Secondary and Elementary schools in Vietnam. Sister held many positions in her community of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, including being in charge of the Formation and convent for 12 years. In 1958 she was superior of Notre Dame de Rosary Convent in Hue. While superior of Mai Khoi School in 1972 she and her Sisters fled and lived in Saigon. Sister was 45 years old at the time.

The story of the Sisters quickly leaving Saigon is one of courage and tenacity. In early 1975, the Vietnam Conflict was coming to an end. The American bases were closing; and the country was in panic, close to collapse. People began to flee the major cities as conditions became worse. Knowing they were in danger the Sisters fled to Vung Tau, a harbor city near Saigon. With little time to prepare, they realized they too, must leave their country. In a short time refugees were leaving by boat and the Sisters realized they, too, must leave their country. Just as rockets began to explode around them, they boarded a small rowboat on very choppy waters, and waited for rescue.

There were seven Daughters of Mary Immaculate and Sister Eugenia's elderly parents who fled together. They finally secured passage on an American ship off shore. As they looked back it was heart breaking to see rockets exploding over the city and realize their country was in ruin. Juliette remembers the most frightening part was having to board the ship by a rope ladder that was two stories high. This American ship brought them to the Philippines. Then, after a month in Guam, they boarded an airplane to Honolulu and after a thirteen hour flight landed in California. Finally the tired group arrived at Camp Pendleton, California.

At that time, Sister Evelyn Joseph Flynn was missioned to San Diego and served in the Chancery Mission Office. She frequently visited the refugees at Pendleton. One day someone asked Sister if she knew the Daughters of Mary Immaculate who were in the camp. She did not; but she quickly located them and started to visit them on a regular basis.

After much discussion, it was mutually agreed that the CSJ community would sponsor the Sisters and Sister Eugenia's parents. This allowed them to remain in the United States and they came to live at Carondelet Center. Their original plan was to re-found their community in the United States. Unable to get ecclesiastical approval for their small group, four of them choose to become part of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Three other Daughters chose to go to the East Coast where one had a relative. It was a heart breaking decision for all of them. Sister Marie Juliette once said, "I am grateful to the Sisters for accepting me into their community and after all these years, I feel happy with them, even if I still miss my homeland."

For almost 20 years while Sister Marie Juliette resided in Tucson, Arizona, she aided the Vietnamese people. Then, after courses at Pima College she ministered at St. Mary's Hospital in Medical Records as clerk, typist, in microfilming and in the mailroom. It was said of Sister you could set your clock by her arrival, she was so punctual. On weekends and during free time she and Sister Simon would serve their beloved Vietnamese people. Her companion and friend, Sister Simon, did everything together. When the community moved them to separate convents (to encourage them to speak more English) Juliette would look into the window of the convent next door to try to see her friend, Sr. Simon).

Once again Juliette had to let go when Simon became ill and had to move to Carondelet Center for care. Simon died there in 2001.

From 2004 - 2008 Sister was appointed a parish minister at Our Lady of Lavang Vietnamese Church in Tucson. Sister Juliette was very excited when the church became a parish. Sister served as a religious educator for the South East Asian refugees, especially the Vietnamese. Visiting the sick and home-bound, assisting families in need was a joy to Sister. She participated in the Cursillo movement and made monthly Holy Hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Sister had a great love of her people, but she rarely talked about what she did.

After more than 30 years in Tucson, on July 14, 2008, Sister Marie Juliette became a member of Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center, and quietly continued her ministry

of prayer and witness. Sister could often be seen in various settings, her lips moving in silent prayer and petition for her family, her sisters, and her country.

Sister Marie Juliette was a woman of faith and prayer, serious and quiet by nature. She also had a sense of humor and her eyes twinkled when she said something funny. She was committed to the vowed life, and had a deep love of solitude. She observed the needs of others and attempted to reach out in helpful and loving ways. You would definitely be happy to be on her prayer list. Sister had a great love of beauty and harmony especially that found in nature.

In 2019 Sister Juliette celebrated her 80th Jubilee as a woman religious. A year later she celebrated her 100th birthday. As her health continued to decline she was transferred to St. John of God Health Center in February 2022. She died peacefully on February 21, 2022 in the early evening.

We can be assured that our loving and gracious God was always close to Sister, especially after having to leave behind her country, community and family members. Sister came to learn anew, only God could fill the void left in her heart.

Our God is indeed close to our dear Juliette, and to the broken-hearted.

~ Sister Frances Baker and Sister Barbara Sullivan