

Even though I never have opportunity to live in the same community with Brother Raphael, in Vietnam nor here in the United States. But I have quite a lot of occasions to meet and to talk to him.

The first occasion was in Dalat, by summer times of 1970 when Brother Raphael was assigned to the Collège d'Adran community, and I was by the end of my third and final year in Scholasticate.

Brother Francis, then Director of the Scholasticate, still living at La Salle University of DENA District, opened a session of intensive learning English, based on the English Nine Hundred book, for three weeks. About 20 Brothers attended this session. We were told that Brother Raphael who has been studying English in England for years, is volunteering to teach English. We also were lucky that the National Military Academy offered its language lab for our use during this session.

Besides the times for individually listening to the tape and repeating simple sentences from the tape, each student has times to, in turn, read loudly a short sentence. One day, Brother Albin repeats by three times this same sentence: "this is a comb I use every day!" On the third time, he put his hand on his head which has no hair! We look at each other and smile joyfully. Suddenly, Brother Raphael turns up his head and... laughs aloud, saying something like "amazing! Interesting!".

Some Brothers around the same age with Brother Raphael told to me later that it's very rare to hearing Brother Raphael laugh aloud. He's rather a quiet man, not much getting along, and usually avoiding crowds.

Brother Raphael was born in 1926, to a family of 5 sons and 6 daughters. He was the 9th son of this family. Of a very religious and pious family, the 8th son joined The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, commonly known as the Redemptorists and became priest, and the 9th son became a De La Salle Brother, Brother Raphael himself, and several daughters and sons involved into liturgical services in different parishes of the diocese of Nha Trang.

Raphael entered the Novitiate, and received the religious Habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1946. He made his final vows on August 3rd, 1953. His long list of assignments shows us two main episodes of his life as a Christian Brother: First, as a member of the District of Saigon for 25 years: from 1951 to

1976. Second, as a member of the District of San Francisco for 43 years: from 1976 to his death on March 22nd, 2019.

In 1951, his first assignment was to the famous school of Pellerin, Hue, then Capital of Vietnam under the last Emperor Bao Dai of the Nguyen Dynasty. From this school, many elite – social and religious as well – were formed. Among them, we may name two presidents of the South Vietnam: Ngô Đình Diệm and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, and several bishops and priests, and religious of different congregations. It's to say that Brother Raphael's first assignment to a famous school could give us a certain idea about his character and competency as a teacher, a young teacher of 25 years old.

After 5 years teaching at Pellerin, St. Joseph and Collège d'Adran, Raphael volunteered to go in mission in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, at Ecole de Miche for 4 years from 1956 to 1960, then in mission in Ile de Maurice, Africa, at St. Mary's College HS for 4 more years, from 1960 to 1964. He then enjoyed kind of a full sabbatical year 1964, to study English at Kintbury, Manchester in England and more than 18 months, until July, 1965 to attend C.I.L program as for his second novitiate in Athis-Mons, France.

Equipped with such spiritual and intellectual baggage, Brother Raphael then 39-year-old, returned to Vietnam, faithfully and zealously accomplished his primary ideal which is totally committed to the educational services for young people, especially for poor people, beginning at Lasan Hố Nai school, Biên Hòa, where most refugees from North Vietnam gathered and re-settled for a new life after the accord of Geneva in 1954, then at Đức Minh, Tân Định, where most students were of free-tuition or half-tuition.

One thing his students and/or former students never forget about, is his very first and favorite lesson when he teaches English for any graders from elementary to secondary classes, and regardless of religion or belief: it is memorizing three principal prayers, in English of course, namely Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be to the Father. If you can recite, fluently and without hesitation, these three prayers? – You pass!

The events of April 30th, 1975 brought overseas many Postulants, Novices, Scholastics, and Brothers. Brother Raphael was among them. The San Francisco District and some other Districts of the United States have been so cordially and

fraternally and generously welcoming the Brothers, refugees from South Vietnam. Brother Raphael was particularly welcomed, and by July 1976 was officially transferred from District of Saigon to San Francisco District. A turning-point for Raphael's second episode of his life as a Christian Brother has been set: officially, Brother Raphael became a member of the San Francisco District.

I think it's a good time to say something else. Before telling something else, please let me ask Brother Raphael.

[...] OK! Thank you, Raphael.

Raphael told to me: "Go ahead, Valery! It's a good idea and it's a good time to say that!"

So, dear Brothers of the San Francisco New Orleans District, on behalf of Brother Raphael, and on behalf of the Vietnamese Brothers and relatives and friends, thank you so much for fraternally welcoming us, and every one of us, as your brother and sister. How wonderful the brotherhood and sisterhood, the fraternity and friendship you share to each of us. Again, thank you!

For the second episode of Raphael's life as a Christian Brother, I think you may know him much more than I do!

I just would like to say a final word to Brother Raphael.

Dear Brother Raphael,

Thank you for being among and with us as a De La Salle Brother. Thank you for giving us good example by your humble and prayerful life, like our Saint Founder De La Salle, our Saint Brothers Benilde, Miguel, Mutien Marie, Scubilion and all Brothers since the beginning of our Institute: "Doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way".

Congratulations to you, Brother Raphael, for being, now and for good, among our Founder St. John Baptist De La Salle, our Confrères, and all members of our beloved Lasallian Family in heaven, for "Procuring God's Glory from Generation to Generation."

May you rest in peace.

Bye for now!