

Overcoming reservations: Experience at DWC transforms shy student

Growing up in Vietnam, Hung Cong Nguyen wasn't very outgoing and preferred to keep to himself.

The only time he really opened up was when he was working with the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement (VEYM). He joined the group when he was just eight years old. Through his participation, he became an altar server, cantor and eventually a leader. When he was 18, Hung's family moved to Riverside, California. He and his siblings all worked at the family's nail salon with their parents. The business was successful and the money was good, but Hung felt unfulfilled. His parents urged him to leave the house and spend time with people his age, but he just wasn't interested. A few years after moving to California, Hung found a nearby church that had a VEYM group. Craving that familiar Catholic connection, he got involved teaching children ages seven to 14.

"When I joined, I realized that the purpose of my life is to serve people," he said. "It made me happy." As Hung participated more with the VEYM group, he stopped taking shifts at the nail salon on busy Saturday afternoons so he could be at the church. "I could have a nice car, but have no friends – it was a waste," he said. "I decided to go to church and serve the kids."

As much as Hung felt fulfilled by his work with children, there was one aspect that really challenged him – the endless questions. "Where does God live?" "How can Mary be a virgin?" Hung struggled to answer the questions that the kids posed. "I went home and kept thinking about the questions they asked. It made me think that I needed to take another step because I didn't have enough knowledge," he recalls. One day when Hung was at a VEYM camp, he met a former SVD priest who told him about Divine Word Missionaries. Soon after, he received a phone call from Vocation Director Fr. Anthony Cong Nguyen, SVD who told him more about the congregation.

Hung flew to Epworth for a Come and See visit and his life quickly started to change. "Before I thought I was an introvert" he said. "Then I came here and I couldn't just sit in my room. The people around me made me work and when I served them, it gave me energy." When Hung went home for a break, his parents recognized the transformation in their son. They told him he talked more, smiled more and had a more positive outlook.



Hung Cong Nguyen

Since starting classes at DWC, Hung has served as treasurer of the Student Senate and president of the Vietnamese Student Association. During sporting competitions and cultural events, he can usually be found on a microphone commenting or encouraging the student body. His enthusiastic voice spills from the speakers and fills the space with his newfound self-assuredness.

Today, Hung is a pre-novice preparing to graduate in May. In the future, he hopes to serve the poor as a priest. Whether it's in Africa, South America or even right here in the United States, Hung says he's ready to serve and excited to see where religious life may take him.