

BROTHERS ANSWERING THE CALL

Not one, but two sets of biological brothers are currently studying and discerning religious life together at Divine Word College. Brothers Anh and An Truong and brothers Khoa and Nhat Pham are all in formation with the Divine Word Missionaries while pursuing their education at the College. Along the way, the four men have also become close friends. Together, they are navigating formation, community life and cultural adjustment far from home while discovering what it means to answer God's call.

Faith Begins at Home

Faith and family played an important role in all four vocations long before they arrived in Epworth. The brothers grew up active in parish life in Vietnam, participating in catechism, church activities and serving at Mass. The Pham brothers remember praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet daily with their family at 3 p.m. Their father served as a catechist while their mother sang in the choir. The Truong brothers also grew up surrounded by faith and had religious sisters among their extended family members.

For both sets of brothers, religious life was not always part of the original plan.

An Unexpected Path

The Truong brothers first came to the United States hoping for a quality education and greater opportunities. After moving to Texas in 2024, Anh encouraged his younger brother, An, to join him for a "Come and See" visit with the SVDs at Divine Word CollegeZN. At first, both imagined very different futures for themselves.

Before entering formation, An never imagined himself pursuing religious life. He expected to build a career, get married and settle into a more traditional future. Although he once held a high-paying job, he said he often "felt like a robot" doing repetitive work day after day.

Anh once believed priesthood would feel restrictive or lonely. He thought the idea of being a priest without a family would be boring. Now, after opening himself to discernment and formation, he says formation has brought him fulfillment and purpose.

Their parents initially struggled with the decision. After making significant sacrifices to send their only two children abroad for education, they hoped the brothers would pursue stable careers. Over time, however, they saw how formation was helping their sons grow academically, spiritually and personally. Today, the brothers say their parents are proud of them and supportive of their discernment.

The Pham brothers' vocation story unfolded differently, but with some similar themes. Khoa first moved to Montreal in 2022 to continue his education and learn English and French. While there, he spent an hour on the bus traveling both directions to a Vietnamese parish where he served at Mass. A year later, Nhat joined him in Canada and became an altar server at a French-speaking parish even before fully understanding the language.

Their family's encouragement and witness helped nurture the possibility of religious life from an early age. The brothers recall participating in parish celebrations of Good Shepherd Sunday as children, dressing as religious leaders alongside other youth in the parish. One brother dressed as a bishop while the other portrayed a cardinal. They still remember relatives commenting on how natural the religious attire seemed on them.

Growing Through Formation

Both brothers also found inspiration through family members already serving the Church, including their uncle, Fr. Linh Pham, who now serves at Divine Word College as Director of Development. Through conversations with SVD vocation directors and

Thousands of miles from their families in Vietnam, four young men at Divine Word College still share something familiar each day: **brotherhood.**

EDUCATING MISSIONARIES

witnessing missionary priests in ministry, the possibility of religious life slowly became clearer.

When Khoa entered formation, Nhat prayed for him and hoped he had made the right choice. Six months later, Nhat decided to join him at Divine Word College. Reflecting on his own experience of discernment at the college, Khoa explained, "I think both of us had already heard God's voice, but I told him that coming here allowed me to hear God's voice more clearly and better understand my vocation."

Like many international students, both sets of brothers experienced challenges adjusting to life in rural Iowa. An described feeling sad and isolated at first after moving from a busy city environment to the small community of Epworth. Khoa also struggled with the lack of public transportation and the slower pace of life. Over time, however, both say the Divine Word College community helped them feel at home.

"Divine Word College changed my mindset about intercultural living," Nhat said. "In Canada, I saw a lot of diversity but people weren't always friendly. When I came here, I saw people from different cultures sitting at the same table and sharing their traditions. It changed my mind."

An said one thing that deeply impressed him about the Divine Word Missionaries was their humility and closeness to the people. "In the SVD, the priests serve the people, they don't serve the priests," he said. "They are very humble."

Living alongside their brothers has also brought both comfort and challenge. The Truong brothers admit they occasionally argue and sometimes feel frustrated when others compare them because of their different personalities. At the same time, they say living together provides encouragement, accountability and support.

"We argue but we always love and depend on each other," An said.

Looking Ahead

As they continue formation, all four young men speak enthusiastically about missionary service and helping others. Some hope to work with youth, others hope to serve the poor, and they're all open to future assignments



Top: Brothers Anh and An Truong

Bottom: Brothers Nhat and Khoa Pham

anywhere in the world — even if it means eventually serving far apart from one another.

For now, though, the four brothers-by-blood and brothers-in-faith continue walking side by side at Divine Word College, discovering together where God may be calling them next.