

Chau Son Monastery

Hidden Treasure of the Delta

Story by Suzi Cassone Photos by Doris Noriega

Many South Vietnamese immigrants in the Sacramento area have long supported Our Lady of Chau Son monastery in their homeland, but they desired a similar community in the Delta region. Abbot Phan in South Viet Nam felt the time was right to proceed with building in the Sacramento Delta. The mission was authorized and Father Dominic Tran was assigned to the task. When Father Thomas of Chico came to bless the project, he sprinkled holy water on the ground and prayed. Then he exclaimed, "Oh, Dominic! You have a lot of work!" Father Dominic replied, "I have nothing to worry about."



Father Dominic Tran

Hidden amid the lush farmland of the Delta, not far from the Sacramento River, is a place created for peace, prayer and serenity. Father Tran is the prior (or administrator) of Our Lady of Chau Son of the Sacramento Diocese. He oversees four priests and one brother at this Cistercian monastery located in Walnut Grove. Stopping to pray seven times daily, they seek to be witnesses to the presence of God. Many have invested prayer and toil in this endeavor for years.

Work progressed as donations of money and materials arrived. Fifty acres of farmland was purchased in 2005. For two years, those in the new order traveled from a rented home in Elk Grove to work the land for nine hours each day. Lawn seeds were scattered. Faithful friends donated one fig tree and several pear trees. Two rows of redwood trees now line the eastern edge of the property to provide comfort and privacy for those who come to pray. These rows are perfectly aligned, though there was no measuring done before planting. "All was done by eye", Father Tran proudly states.

As the monks continue their work joyfully, Father Tran is quick to acknowledge the work of those outside their order. Joey Sanchez is a neighboring farmer who made the entry road, installed power lines and laid water pipes. The first Kubota tractor came from Dolk Tractor of Rio Vista.

The initial holy cross was erected on December 8, 2007 and all the monks have lived there ever since. Plans were sent to a sculptor in South Viet Nam for a 12 foot statue of Christ. Nine packages arrived for assembly at the monastery. Concrete pipe was set in the ground for the foundation, as rebar was inserted to reach to the top of the statue for

stability. It was explained that often the arms of such statues reach heavenward, but on this one, the arms are extended as if to embrace and welcome all who come to Him. The goal is for visitors to meet God here.

After Father Tran explained the motto of this secluded order (to pray and to work), an architect envisioned 14 statues to be erected. They depict the last hours of Christ on what we now call Good Friday. The scenes are known by several names, such as the Stations of the Cross, the Way of the Cross, the Way of Sorrows and the Via Dolorosa. These events were also chronicled in the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*.

During Lent, the season leading up to Easter, the faithful from several Christian denominations walk from image to image, stopping to pray at each one. It is a solemn time of contemplation.

Though those who are familiar with the story will recognize each scene representing the stations of the cross, this is a work in progress. There are plans for signs at each station, describing what is represented. Father Tran has indicated that there will be audio stands to aid visitors in their prayers. He mentioned that eventually there will be a

fifteenth statue at the end of the course, representing Christ's resurrection, with roses planted at the base. Someday, car and bicycle paths will wind past the monuments. And then there are repairs to be made. The arms of one of the statues at the eighth station have been broken by the wind.

Though there is still much to be done before completion, many devotees have already visited. Some youth groups from as far away as San Jose have spent the weekend in tents on the grounds of the monastery, as they dedicate themselves to prayer. It is important to note that this is not a tourist attraction, but is primarily for

those on a spiritual walk, to pray and seek counsel.



The statue of Christ at sunset.



One of the stations of the cross.

To see the monastery, take 220 West out of Ryde. Turn right (north) on Leary Rd. The monastery is less than a mile on your left. Father Tran can be contacted at (916) 477-0595 to schedule an appointment.