

FLF's project for Vietnamese refugees, is drawing to a successful completion

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Church member John Hung (standing, center) with several of the young Vietnamese men he has helped in Washington, D.C.

The New Hope Center, FLF's project for Vietnamese refugees, is drawing to a successful completion. When it officially closes, it will have been successful on the outer level of placing all of the participants in jobs and on the more internal levels of assisting them to adjust to American life and building bridges between them and the Unification movement. As the participants look for apartments in the Washington area or move on to other cities, two have decided to remain with the Unification Church while still others are weighing the possibilities of future membership or assistance.

One such person is Ky Tong Hop, a nineteen-year-old former student at Saigon University. "When I first heard the Divine Principle, I did not quite understand it. After hearing all of it, I had a lot to think about. It forces people to think... I don't yet believe everything in the Divine Principle but I can see the reality. I have met many members of the Church and can see that they are good people. I know that before they joined the Church they were not like what they are today; many of them have changed. I hope that I, too, can change. If people can change, then I think the Divine Principle must be true. The nature of Reverend Moon's mission is yet to be proven. But Reverend Moon has given the world a theory that can change the world -- that theory seems to be working."

Hop is supported in his decision by his cousin, Nguyen Trung Thanh, also nineteen and a student. "After I studied the Divine Principle I found love and truth," he said. "I want to join the Unification Church. I believe that in the future Sun Myung Moon will make a good world. I think that we can have a good society and good nations if individuals are good. I believe that the Principle is true."

Thanh added his observations about the newly formed Vietnamese refugee community: "The Vietnamese coming to the United States found here a materially abundant country. There is much food here so that they are all well fed. But all refugees lack love since most of them lost relatives, even parents and children. Although they may receive enough food and enough money, the main thing is still love. I found that there was true love in the Unification Church, so after a month of thinking I decided to become a member."

Both Thanh and Hop escaped from Vietnam together. "On the thirtieth of April we realized that the situation was very desperate," said Hop. "So we drove to the wharf to try to get aboard a ship. There was a big ship there. We paid some money to soldiers and got on board through a hole. There were only seven hundred people aboard, but by that time, the Communist flag was flying at the Independence Palace, so the captain had to order the ship away from the shore. There were still a lot of people on shore who wanted to get aboard so they jumped into the water and started to swim. Some drowned; others went back to the shore -- very few got to the ship. We threw out ropes to pull them on -- I pulled up three people. Just then a rocket hit the rudder so the captain, not knowing what to do, turned back. But somehow, an unknown old man caused the automatic rudder to function, so we moved from the shore again.

"When we arrived in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, we saw our cousin, Nguyen Van Chin (FLF friend in Vietnam) who said that he had a close friend in Washington, Dan Fefferman, who could sponsor us. But still I couldn't tell if this organization was pro- or anti-Communist. After he went to his sponsor in San

Francisco he again wrote us, so we decided to come here."

Thanh and Hop are in many ways typical of the Vietnamese refugees at the New Hope Center. There is now one family of a man and wife and two children; the rest are young men, mostly single.

Since they don't know English very well yet, most are working at restaurants as dishwashers or busboys. Two are working at the Ginseng teahouse. John Hung Leba, who joined the Church in Hempstead, Long Island, has been taking care of their needs as coordinator. In addition to helping them with the basic adjustments to daily life in the United States, learning English, taking buses, opening bank accounts, etc., he has spent much time counselling them.

John has introduced them to the Divine Principle very informally by taking them to Sunday services and to hear Reverend Moon speak when he came to Washington. Very few have heard lectures. Thanh and Hop were exceptions, John explains, because Thanh's cousin, a Communist living in West Germany, had been asking Thanh to come to Germany to live with him. John quickly gave them an overview of the Divine Principle so that Thanh could have a good alternative to Communist ideology to counter his beliefs.

Thanh and Hop are leaving their busboy jobs to become fulltime Church members. They are also asking a friend to come from California to Washington in order to hear Divine Principle lectures from John in Vietnamese. The rest of the refugees are more likely to get jobs, look for occupational training, and settle into apartments. But for some of them, the Divine Principle has made some changes in their future. Hoang Neo, 26, was a Navy man on maneuvers in the Philippines when Vietnam fell, so he had no opportunity to be reunited with his wife and two children, who are still in Vietnam. In his refugee camp he found some friends who were going to Boston; he promised to join them when he could. Now he has plans to live with them and work in a shoe factory in Boston.

"Even though I am going to Boston, ' said Neo, "my mind is still here. I intend to teach the Divine Principle to my friends and cooperate with John in the future with the intention of saving my country. I would like to become a member but I am having a conflict within myself because I think lot about my family. I will tell my friends about the good deeds of the members here and how well I was treated. And I will also tell them the reasons why in my heart I would like to join. Now I am going to Boston not just because I like my friends but because I have a higher purpose."

Echoing Thanh's ideas, John comments about Vietnamese refugees now in the United States: Many refugees are having difficulty with their sponsors. Usually sponsors are unable to give them love, so many of them don't have hope or direction... But I have hope for these refugees and the Vietnamese refugees in general." While the future involvement of Thanh and Hop in the Family is yet uncharted, John says, "They understand the Principle very well. They are willing to sacrifice. They have read all of the negative publicity, but they don't believe it."

FLF Secretary General Dan Fefferman comments on the refugee project: "Ie has been a very rewarding experience. We have learned very much from them and we hope that we have helped them find new hope and to make the adjustment to American culture. I am especially pleased that so many of them are determined to help us in the future. FLF represents America's mission to defend the world against Communist aggression and to win the ultimate ideological victory. When America failed to support the Vietnamese people to the end in their struggle against Communism, FLF symbolically took on a portion of that responsibility by sponsoring Vietnamese refugees."