

## E-BULLETIN #129

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

item 244

### a remarkable journey



*Governor Designate Le*

When the next Governor of South Australia, Hieu Van Le, arrived at Darwin as a penniless boat person fleeing Vietnam in 1977, he was greeted by two zinc-nosed fishermen in a tinny, who raised a beer and said: 'G'day mate, welcome to Australia!'

If there was a defining moment which said to the world that **Hieu Van Le** would be a leader, it came in a small wooden fishing boat crammed with more than 50 seasick people three days out to sea from Vietnam in 1977.

Mr Le, just 21 at the time, his wife Lan, and Vietnamese people of all ages and from all walks of life had successfully escaped their war-torn country, but now faced miles of ocean with no maps or navigational aids and a skipper who had reached the limit of the waters he knew.

"The skipper, a local fisherman, summoned us together and said he didn't know which way to go or what else to do," said Mr Le. "We were mostly people from cities; many of us had never even been in a boat before. I waited for someone to come up with a solution. Nobody had any practical suggestions, neither the older people we deferred to nor the professional people - everyone was arguing.

Eventually, with youthful exuberance, frustration and some recklessness under the circumstances, I grabbed some paper and drew a map of Vietnam and the region as best I could remember." With roughly sketched map in hand, Mr Le announced that the only way to go was west which should bring them to Malaysia or Thailand. Two days later they saw fishing boats with Malaysian flags and Hieu Van Le was their acknowledged leader.

One major hurdle overcome, the next few days were nightmare material with coastguards turning them away, sometimes at gunpoint, every time they tried to land." When you escape from one country to another in a fragile boat with very limited supplies, water and fuel, the first thing you want to do is to land at the nearest place you can. But it turned out to be quite impossible," said Mr Le.

"Mentally we weren't prepared for that. Before we left we were told by the so-called skippers and people in the know that once we'd successfully escaped the Vietnamese shore and made it into international waters there would be plenty of ships - a kind of highway of ships - that would pick us up and bring us to shore. It wasn't happening. Nobody wanted us." They tried to land six times at different points along the coastline of Malaysia and Singapore and, every time, the coastguard towed their boat back out to sea.

Eventually, running out of water and supplies, in hopelessness and desperation they all abandoned the boat and swam towards shore, again to Mr Le's direction and in defiance of the shouts to stop and the weapons being aimed at them.

Ten days after leaving Vietnam, they found themselves in a Malaysian refugee camp of 5000 people. It was overcrowded and the conditions were appalling, with disease rife and supplies insufficient. And, perhaps worst of all, there seemed little prospect of settlement in another country. "We were out of sight and out of mind and weren't getting a lot of attention from any other countries," said Mr Le. "Again with youthful determination we thought we've come this far but we haven't yet reached our goal, so we decided to go again."

Hieu and Lan were asked to join a group planning to leave for Australia. They were much better prepared for the second boat journey with good maps, lessons in navigation, spare parts for their motor and adequate supplies.

It took over a month of often stormy open seas until they reached Darwin on 21 November 1977 and then by plane to Adelaide just over a week later.

Settling into Australian life was a challenge although they met with unexpected kindnesses like the Schwarz family who heard about them in the media and invited them for Christmas.

Hieu and Lan found work at a local factory and then, in 1978 Mr Le started his degree in Economics and Accounting at the University of Adelaide, studying part-time while he worked as a Finance Officer for the Health Commission. He also worked hard to help the growing Vietnamese community integrate into South Australia.

"Right from the first day I became active in the community," he said. "This served a lot of purposes. I always felt a huge responsibility to make sure that the communities were able to integrate and settle well into their life in Australia. "On the other hand, I was extremely pressured by the fact that the Australian public had very little, if not a false, understanding of Vietnam's history and the presence of refugees. Also, the anti-Vietnam war movement was quite strong, and therefore the arrival of Vietnamese refugees was not readily accepted or welcomed by some people."

Ever since his arrival, Mr Le has enjoyed a strong presence in the media and worked with governments, local members of parliament and various organisations to educate the Australian public, give his community a voice and promote their culture.

In 1991 Mr Le was appointed a member to the SA Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, becoming Deputy Chairman in 2001 and Chairman two years ago. He is the longest serving member of the Commission and the first person of Asian background to be Chairman. "Today, everywhere you go in South Australia, you find existence of cultural diversity," he said. "People accept the diversity as a fantastic, positive blend of life that's quite enriching. South Australia has a wonderful cultural heritage."

Mr Le is also a Senior Manager with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), responsible for regulating the financial services industry and investment markets in the State.

In 1996 Mr Le received an Australia Day Medal for outstanding service to ASIC and was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal for service to the advancement of multiculturalism. As this edition went to press he was due to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Adelaide in recognition of his outstanding achievements.

In 2001 he completed his Masters in Business Administration (MBA), again at the University of Adelaide and in 2007 Mr Le was appointed South Australia's Lieutenant Governor.

He treasures the time he spent at the University. "We Vietnamese highly value academic achievement," he said. "The University of Adelaide has been a fantastic institution for me, both helping me to settle and to integrate, but also as a wonderful foundation for life. I'm so thankful for that."



Robyn Mills – Adelaide – SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
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item 245

## “not riches, but God!”

*Firstly*, it must be remembered that we need money and it is always in service of our apostolate and mission. It would be wrong to think that money and its administration are matters that require little attention. During the meeting of the Superiors General, in May 2014, I talked with many of them in order to get some insight into the situation with the Vatican Bank. To my amazement many responded that they were not aware of anything untoward since financial matters were all looked after by their bursars. I believe that this indicates a quite wrong priority. All matters concerning finance, investments, accounting, transparency, etc., must be of concern for the General/Provincial/Local councils – and the bursars must be the faithful administrators of those material resources. Today, more than ever, we need to administer our financial resources with diligence and honesty.

*Secondly*, whenever there is a project of God, then financial resources will not be lacking. However, if the motivation is not right, we not only can struggle but even lose our financial resources. A project of God is meant for the growth of His Kingdom, and should be exercised with a great sense of solidarity and charity. A project of God will always be sensitive to the needy. Often we spend much of our material resources on building up structures, yet when it comes to the formation of members, we are very careful in spending. In fact the best investment is made always on developing human resources. Recently we examined the budget of a province and the money spent on spiritual formation of its members was just euro 200. Let us hope that it was a mistake in accounting. However, at times it is truly the case. Many of us fear to take up new missions because we are afraid of the financial investments that we may have to make. Let us be serene. If there is a project of God, we will also find the necessary resources. Trust in divine providence is a fundamental gospel message.

*Thirdly*, our spiritual attitudes towards money and material wealth are of great importance. Both the rich and the poor are God's children. What distinguishes the two groups is their attitude towards material possession. We cannot serve both God and mammon. Hence both the basic detachment of our heart from worldly possessions and the God-centredness of our existence are of vital importance.

Pope Francis warns us against today's idolatry of money. He writes in his Apostolic Exhortation:

“The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The





worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption” (*Joy of the Gospel*, 55).

It is true that none of us is living a very luxurious life. But we can also unknowingly fall into the temptation of spiritual worldliness, as Pope Francis reminds us:

“Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and well-being” (*Joy of the Gospel*, 93).

This spiritual worldliness then begins to destroy our interior spiritual life, as Pope Francis warns us:

“Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades...Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the Risen Christ” (*Joy of the Gospel*, 2).

Pope Francis opens his Apostolic Exhortation “*Joy of the Gospel*” with these words:

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (*Joy of the Gospel*, 1).

This is also our prayer at this moment. May all that we are, and what we do, be for the infinite glory of God and his Kingdom. We repeat with our holy Founder: “Not riches, but God”!

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## sac asia oceania e-bulletin

### you commented...

**on #128** Another good piece by Fr Noel Connolly, whom I've been following since he was Provincial of the Columbans. And Brandon Olley's extracurricular activity is certainly different!

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