



Knights of Columbus recognize altar servers

Almost 100 altar servers in the Diocese of Oakland were recognized March 11 at the annual Bishop's Vocation and Priest Recognition Dinner sponsored by the Oakland Diocese Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. The 600 guests listened to music, prayer and song and to a rousing vocation story by Rev. Bich Nguyen.

ALL: ALBERT C. PACCIORINI/THE CATHOLIC VOICE



Rev. George Alengadan and
Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ.



Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ, and
Rev. Quang Minh Dong.



Knight Manuel J. Diaz, vice president,
and Knight Romeo L. Cabrera, president.



Rev. Bich Nguyen

Vocation gives meaning to life

*By Albert C. Pacciorini
Staff writer*

"I found meaning to life by serving my brothers and sisters," Rev. Bich Nguyen said, relating why he became a priest to the 600 people at the annual Bishop's Vocation and Priest Recognition Dinner March 11.

"I am happier than I could ever imagine before becoming a priest," Father Nguyen said, advising seminarians and potential future priests, "Open your hearts to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Open your hearts to priesthood and religious life.

"It's not just a job," he said in his stirring talk. There is "always a thirst in the souls of human beings in search for God. A priest is the bridge between God and the people ... because humanity never ceases its thirst for God."

The annual dinner, held at the Garaventa Center at Carondelet High School, Concord, is sponsored by the Oakland Diocese Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. It is also a fundraiser to help generate more vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

At the dinner, the various Knights' councils presented donations to Romeo L. Cabrera, president of the Knight's chapter and emcee for the dinner, to help the diocese with the cost of vocations. Last year the group raised about \$10,000; this year's number isn't yet compiled.

Father Nguyen recalled growing up near a Benedictine monastery in Vietnam, and listening to their prayers.

"It was the beginning of my vocation," he said. But it faded, and years later, he emigrated to the United States, and by age 22 was working in Silicon Valley. He thought: I have a job. I am pursuing the American dream. "But I felt a void. Deep down I was still seeking something. Finding a vocation gave meaning to my life."

He went to San Diego to study and in an event that presaged his life, while in a bookstore, a clerk offered him a used book for 50 cents. It was "The Consecrated Life."

"I still have that book," he said.

He attended the seminary in Menlo Park, and while watching a friend prostrate at the altar during ordination, "I realized I am being called to be a priest. I want to be laid out there, committed to serving the Church."

Altar servers, about 100 of them, were given certificates of appreciation. **Two priests, Rev. Quang Minh Dong, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Brentwood, and Rev. George Alengadan, pastor at St. Joseph Basilica, Alameda, were honored as outstanding clergy.**

Father Quang, who spent six years ministering to the Vietnamese community in Las Vegas' poorest parish, was upbeat. "My theme is to say yes to God, say yes to life."

Father Alengadan said being a priest is "the best job in the world. It has its ups and downs but at end of day, to be with people in their times of joy and sorrow, I'd do it again."

And, he added with a smile, "it's a secure job; 24-7."

During the evening, a musical group from St. James the Apostle Parish in Fremont sang songs written by their pastor, Rev. Antony Vazhappilly.

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ, noted "I don't know of another diocese that has a vocation dinner this big."

He noted that when Raiders Coach Jack Del Rio joined the team, he visited the bishop and requested a team chaplain. "He realized having a priest (with the team) was important," the bishop said. He appointed Rev. Neal Clemens, vocations director, to be the Raiders' chaplain.

Bishop Barber also recalled confirming Jesus Rojas, a courageous high school student suffering from leukemia. "He died in the hospital with a priest at his side," the bishop said, concluding the clergy and religious "want to be there with you."