

BRIGHTON -- Deacon Peter Dong Huy Pham grew up surrounded by faith.

Deacon Pham served here at our Parish for 8 weeks during the summer of 2023

He was born in Hanoi and raised in a predominantly Catholic village just outside the city. His parents were farmers who grew rice, tomatoes, green beans, and cabbage. He would help harvest the rice by hand, clean the fields during the harvest, and pump water for the vegetables.

"It's hard," he told The Pilot on Feb. 13, "but I just enjoyed it because my parents didn't put any pressure that I have to do anything perfect."

His local church was three minutes from his house. He would go there every evening with his mother and grandmother. While serving as an altar boy, he got to know the priests in his parish.

"I think that is the time my seed of the vocation started to bloom in my life," he said.

Deacon Pham, 29, is a seminarian at St. John's Seminary in Brighton and a transitional deacon at Resurrection and St. Paul Parishes in Hingham. When he is ordained a priest in May, he wants to bring himself and others closer to God.

"The priest is the only one who can celebrate the Holy Eucharist," he said. "Making God's presence is a great gift, and also bring the souls of the people to God."

After graduating from high school, Deacon Pham started to think and pray about a possible vocation. At the time of his graduation, prospective university students in Vietnam were required to take entrance exams. The Archdiocese of Hanoi also required such an exam to enter its discernment program for young men considering the priesthood.

"We spent a lot of time and money to prepare for that," Deacon Pham said.

A passing or failing grade on the exam could be life changing.

"It's kind of brutal, but for me, it's more important, because if I failed that one, I may not be accepted to the discernment program," he said.

He passed the exam, which he said was a "fabulous feeling."

"What I want to do is respond to the call, that God is calling me to the priesthood," he said.

Deacon Pham spent four years in the program -- two shadowing a priest in a parish, and two in a house with other men studying for the priesthood.

The experience in the house prepared him for his time at St. John's Seminary. Every day, he and the other men would wake up for Mass at 5:30 a.m., eat breakfast at 6:30 a.m., then spend the rest of the day studying before evening holy hour and prayer. The bishops of Hanoi decided that Deacon Pham would be a good fit to study and become a priest in the U.S. He came to Boston to study English in 2018, then entered St. John's the following year.

"I didn't think that one day I'm going to go outside the country," he said. "But then, after praying and consulting with priests and then people who were responsible for my formations in Vietnam, I believed that I can go everywhere that God wants me to go."

He is still learning English and adapting to life in the U.S. Preaching as a deacon in Hingham has helped his language skills. He has found that Americans are more open and talkative, but that Vietnamese communities are more close-knit. In Vietnam, neighbors tend to be friends, and guests often show up uninvited. Deacon Pham received neighborly treatment from his fellow seminarians.

"I felt a warm welcome among my fellow men," he said. "They helped me a lot, especially with my language and cultural adaptations."

In his spare time, Deacon Pham enjoys photography.

"I believe when you look at the nature, you will find out the power of God," he said. "And also, when you look at the nature, we can just realize and then glorify God."

He also enjoys travel, mostly to places in the U.S. with Vietnamese Catholic communities. He has been to Washington state, California, and Virginia, and will be visiting Florida in the spring. The trips have taught him about American culture and how it differs regionally.

"The first thing I've noticed differently is the accents they use," he said. "Also, the way they concern the policy, politics is different, and also I will say the way of life is also different from place to place. I can't say how it's different, but I just feel like it's different."

He talks to his family in Vietnam almost every week. They are worried about him because he is so far away, but they are also proud of him for "responding to the call of God."

"I'm so excited and looking forward to the day," he said of his upcoming ordination, "because it is not only a special gift for me, but I hope that when I become a priest, I can give that gift to people."