

# What One Should Know About the Issue Involving the Redemptorists' Land and Property in Thai Ha Parish, Hanoi



Figure 1. *Combat Police Blocking and Threatening Catholics*

Fellow Catholics,

All who love justice, truth and peace,

All who truly desire to help bring freedom and democracy to Vietnam and elect a government that follows the law.

## **FACTS: VIOLENT LANGUAGE, USE OF FORCE AND ARRESTS**

For a number of days starting on October 2, 2011, high-power loudspeakers belonging to the Quang Trung Administrative Area beamed towards Thai Ha Church the government's "plan to build a wastewater treatment plant for Dong Da Hospital" on the 2000 m<sup>2</sup> lot belonging to the church. Later events took place over a number of days. First, representatives of Dong Da Hospital came to the church to deliver the same message. Subsequently, the Quang Trung People's Committee requested a representative of Thai Ha Church to come to its offices to hear the message.

In response, Thai Ha Parish promptly submitted a request to the appropriate government units to: (1) stop all activities under the wastewater treatment project; and, (2) return to the parish the land and buildings that the government borrowed. Furthermore, the parish used an electronic sign to display its legitimate demand.

Concurrently the government-owned media launched a furious campaign of libel, slander, false accusations and threats against parishioners, brothers and priests in Thai Ha. Following this, the government resorted to its familiar tactics: its employees and police mustered a number of strangers, i.e., outside thugs who came to the church to threaten, harass and terrorize priests, monks and parishioners. On November 8, 2011, a government agent came to Mr. Dung's house and fomented a heated discussion. The police used this as an excuse to arrest Mr. Dung.

The underlying reality is that, like so many other Vietnamese, Thai Ha parishioners are being victimized by a corrupt regime that only cares about its own privileges. The regime frequently makes arbitrary decisions and backs them up by force instead of following the law.

The government-owned media is trying to paint us as putting roadblocks to stop a humanitarian project that will yield public benefits. However, nothing is further from the truth. We follow the law even as the government violates the law through its total disregard of its citizens' rights, the rights that the government is supposed to respect and protect.

To help you understand the current situation, we offer the following details:

F. 68  
P. 60 et 61

Acte de Cession de Propriété.

Conformément aux dispositions du décret du 16 janvier 1939, promulgué en Indochine par arrêté du 21 décembre 1939, et pour bénéficier de l'article 16 du dit décret:

Nous soussignés:

François Chaize, Vicaire Apostolique de Hanoi, domicilié à Hanoi;  
d'une part; et  
Edmond Dionne, Président du Conseil d'Administration des Pères Rédemptoristes, domicilié à Saigon, d'autre part:

déclarons expressément que la propriété des terrains ci-après désignés actuellement immatriculés au nom de Monseigneur Chaize, est transférée au Conseil d'Administration des Pères Rédemptoristes:

1) Un terrain d'une contenance superficielle de six hectares quatorze ares, cinquante-cinq centiares d'après titres, situés à Chaize, D. D. H. Ensemble toutes les constructions édifiées sur le dit terrain consistant plus spécialement d'une église, une grande maison d'habitation, une salle d'œuvres, spécialement affectées à l'exercice du culte et tout le mobilier garnissant les dits bâtiments.

2) Un terrain situé dans la ville de Nam Dinh, au quartier de Nam My, il est borné au Nord par la digue de ceinture, au sud par le Bd Courbet à l'est par la rue Nguyen Huu no prolongée, à l'ouest par une rue nouvelle.

Ensemble toutes les constructions édifiées sur le dit terrain consistant plus spécialement en une chapelle et une maison d'habitation spécialement affectées à l'exercice du culte.

Fait en double et de bonne foi à Hanoi, le 16 mai 1944.

Signature de S. E. Mgr Chaize. Signature du Président du Conseil.

Vu pour légalisation de la signature  
de Monsieur EDMOND DIONNE, Président du Conseil  
d'Administration des Pères Rédemptoristes, apposée  
ci-dessous.

CHUNG HANH 1944  
Bienhoa le 22 JANV 1944  
L'Administrateur de HANOI

SOUS-LE 26 2  
204 2005

Inscrit au registre cadastral  
de la Ville de Nam-Dinh sous les  
parcelles N°s 60 et 61, Feuille  
N°s 68

Nam-Dinh, le 3 Décembre 1951  
Le Chef du Service du Cadastre pro-  
vincial,

NGUYEN XUAN KHUONG  
Cof. sy chuyen mon Liu Chinh

NGUYEN TRI HOA

Figure 2. Property Transfer Document from the Vicar Apostolic to the Redemptorists

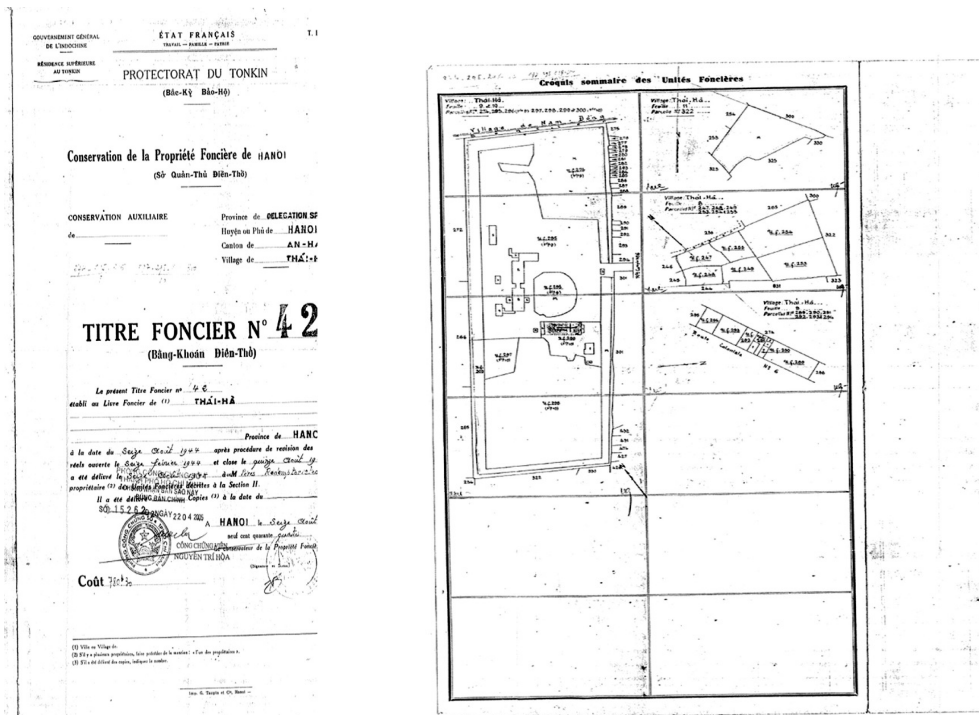


Figure 3. Thai Ha Title Deed and Survey Showing that the Property Adjoins Highway 6 (Now Nguyễn Lương Bằng Street)



Figure 4. Thai Ha Property at Time of Purchase in 1928



Figure 5. *Thai Ha Church Has Been In Use Since 1935*

### **BUILDING FACILITIES AND SERVING THE PEOPLE**

The Redemptorist Order is a Catholic organization striving to bring Christ's message to the people and help the poor. We came to Hanoi in 1926. In 1928 we bought a parcel slightly larger than 6.1 hectares (slightly more than 15 acres) bordering Highway 6 (currently Nguyễn Lương Bằng Street) and established the Thai Ha Redemptorist Order. We completed the first monastery building in 1930 and the second building in 1939. The existing church was built in 1935. Decades later, the government unilaterally "borrowed" these adjoining buildings for use as Dong Da Hospital. On the parcel of land, the Order also built a community center and gymnasium that the government confiscated and eventually turned into a public park (as of June 1, 2008).

Consistent with its mission, the Thai Ha Redemptorist Order built facilities aimed at serving those in need, including:

- Camps to assist and house thousands of refugees fleeing famine or diseases in 1945, and displaced by war in 1946-1954. A few of the structures remain standing near Mr. Dong's house at the end of Alley No. 180, near Ba Giang Pond
- Kham Thien Secondary School and several elementary schools built between 1928 and 1954 in villages that are now part of Dong Da and Thanh Xuan Districts. Those were the first schools offering Western-style curricula (as opposed to Chinese classical education) that many senior citizens (now in their 70's) had the opportunity to attend in the pre-1954 period. Thai Ha Parish played a key role in expanding educational opportunities, medical care and sports in the region.

### **PROPERTY "BORROWED" OR CONFISCATED**

Soon after the current government came to power in 1954, it implemented a policy of taking over all the schools that Thai Ha Parish had established and was running, and it also seized the parish's land in villages around Thai Ha. The rows of houses facing Nguyễn Lương Bằng Street and the houses in the area southwest of the church were used to house refugees from other areas without charge. Residents transferred property to others and even took money for the transactions over the years. Some houses have been "passed" from one family to another. The parish has never raised the issue of its legitimate ownership of those portions of its property that are currently occupied by people who are clearly in difficult circumstances.

*A number of ill-intentioned individuals spread the false rumor about Thai Ha Parish planning to ask for the return of the property around the church that is currently occupied by private citizens. The parish emphatically denies that it has such a plan and declares that it wants the current residents to continue to use the land and houses as they have been doing.*

After the government seized its schools, Thai Ha Parish and its Redemptorists were left with only the facilities housing the brothers, the church building, the community center that is a way from the street, and a number of small structures around the church. Even this remnant of what the Order had for its religious life and its mission to serve was gradually encroached upon. In 1959 government representatives forced Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích and Br. Phạm Văn Đạt to "loan" the government one of the two buildings housing the brothers so that the government could turn it into a school. In 1972 the government unilaterally took over the remaining building and created Dong Da Hospital from the two seized buildings. It should be noted that the regime sent Br. Phạm Văn Đạt to a prison camp, Công Trời, in 1960 where he died in 1970 for his vigorous opposition to the 1959 requisition of church property.

Some time later, Dong Da District officials "borrowed" the parish's community center and set up a wool knitting factory over the protests by Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích and the parishioners. In the late 1970's, the government "borrowed" the auxiliary building at the front of the church and turned it into Station No. 2 and a Red Cross office; and "borrowed" a section of St. Gerard's Building and turned it into a machine shop, the Thăng Long Cooperative.

Forcing the Church to "loan" her property was not based on any codified law. This is not surprising because the Church has NEVER OFFICIALLY DONATED property, NEVER SIGNED A TRANSFER OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY OR RIGHT TO USE, and NEVER SOLD property to any unit of the government.

The brothers and their helpers had to move into the tiny houses near the church building and make a living off Ba Giang Pond. Even under such dire conditions, they have continued to help less fortunate people in various ways.



Figure 6. *Thai Ha Monastery - The Two Adjoining Buildings Forming the Letter L (circa 1939). Currently "on Loan" as Dong Da Hospital.*

## **PRESERVING THE PROPERTY'S LOOKS AND RESPECTING THE CHURCH'S RIGHTS**

Facts related to the property being borrowed and used as Dong Da Hospital:

The government employees who administer the hospital have been thoughtful in their dealings with Thai Ha Church because they knew that the Church owns the buildings. The administrators have not done anything to change the physical looks of the monastery buildings. They have also been consulting the brothers of the Order before making any modification to the borrowed property.

Examples are provided below:

- When the cross on the roof of one of the two buildings being used as a hospital came apart, the hospital manager notified the Church, and both sides coordinated on the repair.
- When a carport is to be built, the manager asked the Church for permission to move priests' and brothers' remains from the graves in the yard to a cemetery to make room for the carport. The hospital paid for all the associated expenses.
- Across from the monastery's corridor stood an old banyan tree that has lost a number of branches. When the hospital management team thought that the tree should come down, they consulted with Thai Ha priests and parishioners. They only cut the tree down after the Church gave her approval.
- In 1993, a new hospital manager expressed his intention to build a structure next to the path that led to the church. When the priests and parishioners voiced their disapproval, he stopped the project.

These examples show that hospital staff knew that the facilities that they are using are indeed Thai Ha Church's property and the management responsibility is still with the Church.

## **AN UNACCEPTABLE GOVERNMENT DECISION**

In September 2011, city officials and Dong Da District officials (perhaps recently appointed to their current positions) unilaterally decided to have a wastewater treatment plant built at the projected expense of millions of U.S. dollars. After the government made the decision, Dong Da Hospital sent a representative to Thai Ha Church to "notify" church authorities. Shortly afterwards, the Quang Trung Sub-district People's Committee invited the parish priest to its offices to receive the "notification".

The hospital and Quang Trung government's actions show that the hospital facilities and grounds are still Thai Ha Parish's property, but the entities borrowing the property want to have the unilateral decision-making right with respect to a property that is not theirs. In effect, the borrowers want to usurp the rights of ownership and stewardship after they forcibly took over the right to use the property.

Thai Ha Church is determined to protest because the officials' decision is shortsighted and faulty. The Church's determined opposition is similar to her opposition to the government's attempt to divide the sacred ground dedicated to the Virgin Mary into lots that would fatten further corrupt officials. The Church's resolute opposition resulted in the corrupt officials' having to give up by deciding that the land should be used as a public park. Everyone knew that those officials who are used to interfering and manipulating would never have thought of using that land for a public park without the parishioners' opposition.

## **WHY DOES THE CHURCH OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION?**

When the Church received the official notification concerning the "wastewater treatment plant for Dong Da Hospital", she realized immediately that it was window-dressing trickery, especially



after the official media disclosed the "Dong Da Hospital Improvement Project" estimated to cost millions of U.S. dollars. Everyone knew that the improvement project's real objective is to tear down the monastery's two buildings and, in the process, wipe out Thai Ha Church's proof of ownership. The government has shown its desire to perpetuate its confiscation of property belonging to Thai Ha Parish's Catholics and the Redemptorist brothers and priests.

The parish will defend its right because it wants to see the country's law followed and social justice guaranteed. The parish protests the government's illegal and immoral action that violates the right of thousands of parishioners while undermining the legal framework of the nation, leading to further societal decline and the weakening of Vietnam.

## **THE COUNTRY'S LAW REQUIRES EVERYONE TO RESPECT RELIGIOUS FACILITIES**

Thai Ha Church has not offered the Dong Da Hospital buildings and grounds to the government. During the war, pressing needs and the lack of resources led the Church to acquiesce to the "borrowing" of her property for use as a hospital, but the buildings and land remain the legally recognized property of Thai Ha Parish and the Hanoi Redemptorists. The government's unilateral decision concerning the "Dong Da Hospital Improvement Project" violates the law of the land and sets a precedent for citizens who intend to violate the law and use force. As more and more people follow the government's lead and commit crimes, it will be disastrous for Vietnam. Thai Ha Church does not want to see the potential damage to our society, nor does she want to see the government disregard the law that it had enacted on its own accord.

Conversely, the Church's request for the government to stop the project and return her property is perfectly legal. If any of the Church's activities were illegal, how could she hope to credibly guide believers and teach them the right path? The parish wishes only to show its position in peaceful ways: **(1) Together, we go to the appropriate government offices to present our views; and, (2) Display a sign at the church requesting the government's return of the parish's property.**

That's all there is to it! It is incomprehensible why the official media has been accusing us of all kinds of misdeeds without mentioning the legal and moral basis underlying all of our written requests that have been submitted to the government.

In recent years numerous groups and individuals have gone to government offices in Hanoi to offer petitions and requests, using various signs and banners to display their objectives. For example, a few years ago Van Phuc Village residents in Ha Dong District took to the streets while carrying signs with the message "Song Da Company: Return Van Phuc's Land" and beating on drums. The sign displayed on the church building is about our request for the return of our property and is not for commercial, profit-making activities. Therefore, government regulations of commercial advertising are not at all applicable. The only illegal activities are: (a) those committed by the official media when they falsely accused Thai Ha of nefarious deeds; and, (b) that committed by the government when it fined the Church for some purported "commercial advertising" infractions.

Furthermore, the government's shameless lie – that Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích (deceased) and Thai Ha Church had offered the parish's property to the government – is totally unfounded. Before his death, Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích maintained that he had never offered property to the government. We have preserved his announcements over the years. Worse, the government even falsified papers, a laughable and yet tragic development when officials who supposedly work for the citizenry and speak for the law engage in larceny. In 2008, as previously mentioned, the Church resisted the government's attempt to divide "borrowed" church land into lots for subsequent profitable dealings by corrupt officials. The Hanoi Police Chief, Mr. Nguyễn Đức Nhanh, requested the parish's 3 priests to meet with him. At his office, he showed the photocopy of a paper supposedly signed by Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích in which the priest ceded the use and management of Church property to the

government. We asked for the original paper, but Mr. Nhanh could offer only weak excuses. In the presence of all the officials at that meeting, I (Rev. Nguyễn Văn Khải) said that the handwriting did not look like Rev. Bích's. We made a copy of that photocopy. Some time later, experts noted that the document was a fake because the font and letter spacing was computer-generated, inconsistent with the alleged age of the documents, the 1960's when printers knew only typesetting.

The government sent us 4 documents to the effect that Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích had "ceded" all the property on over 61,000 m<sup>2</sup> (over 15 acres) to the government in 1961. However, the 4 documents showed different dates for the alleged "ceding", implying that the Church "ceded" a total of 245,000 m<sup>2</sup> (over 60 acres). Just one instance of "ceding" would have given the government all of Thai Ha's property and abolished the Hanoi Redemptorist Order! When we pointed out the inconsistencies, the Vice-Chair of Hanoi's People's Committee, Mr. Vũ Hồng Khanh, blushed and said to his experts: "Please study this and select one of the documents for consistency's sake!" How disingenuous! The government could not come up with a "best" document because they were all fake. The government made use of forged documents when needed in order to intimidate private citizens.

Justice and truth go together. Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích, our devoted, wise and respectable pastor, never "ceded" Church property to the government for it to manage. How could we insult his memory now by acquiescing to the government's unilateral decision to build a wastewater treatment plant, an illegal act? We would rather die than go along.

Our parish abided by the law when we submitted our petition and displayed our position peacefully, as allowed by the law. We have always avoided the use of violence and violent words. It is the government that disregards the country's law and resorts to violence when others see that its arguments lack validity. This happened in 2008 when the government attempted to make permanent its illegal use of Church property. We should not let the government make the same mistake again.

## **OFFICIAL LIES AND LIBEL**

The official media claimed that Thai Ha Church's opposition to the wastewater treatment plant and hospital improvement project was not acceptable because the Church does not "care" for local people. On the contrary, the parish and Redemptorist Order have always worked to ensure that every citizen and organization are treated with dignity, receive help as needed, and have opportunities to grow physically and mentally.

The monastery's two buildings were designed for religious use from the start and not for use as a hospital. We request that the government return the borrowed property to its rightful owner and let the Church operate the hospital to serve the needy, consistent with the Church's traditional mission and activities.

Our concern for the people, with respect to the 20,000 or so individuals who come to Thai Ha each week for Mass, led us to request the government to let us use our property for its original religious purpose. Over the past fifty some years, Hanoi's population has grown by 10 times and so has the number of Catholics. Yet the government has caused our useable property to be drastically reduced.

Our concern for the people and Vietnam led us to support the rule of law and just treatment of each individual and organization, now and in the future. By demonstrating the government's respect for Thai Ha Church's property, the government will prove that it can respect everyone else's property. In victimizing Thai Ha Parish, the government has sent a message to all its citizens that any individual and organization could be victimized. The key issue is following the law and ensuring order and justice. It is not acceptable to disguise the confiscation of Church property as concern for sick people.



We need to examine the issue of caring for patients. The government runs most hospitals, using tax money. How has the government cared for patients? What is the average number of patients per bed? How is the quality of care? On what basis were fees determined? Does hospital staff discriminate patients by wealth and position? Are hospitals places where lives are saved or is the emphasis on making a profit - to the chagrin of conscientious medical personnel? If the government truly cares about its citizens, will it allow religious organizations to run hospitals as they used to do? If Thai Ha Church wanted to establish a hospital, would the government allow it?

How would most people react to the arbitrary decision to convert their houses or office buildings into hospitals? If everyone behaved like the government, i.e., use the end to justify the means, how could our society survive? Those who are not careful about examining the government's current propaganda could wind up becoming victims very soon.

Impartial observers can see that Thai Ha Church is a small entity without any means of forcing our will on the government, and that it would be foolish for us to provoke the government by opposing it for no reason. Moreover, the Church must set an example to believers by doing everything lawfully and showing concern for mankind. How could the Church disobey the law and show a total lack of concern for the sick and other community members? Never! Thai Ha Church is not such an entity! The Church must act in accordance with her conscience in protesting unethical acts committed by unscrupulous people in power. The Church's actions are peaceful and based on what the law allows. The Church asks for nothing more than for justice and truth to be respected, for the law to be followed, and for her right to be left in peace in order to serve the community and society.

## **THE GOVERNMENT'S USE OF FORCE AND ITS AFTERMATH**

The government perpetrated the following illegal acts in the hope of achieving its dishonest aims:

- Beaming libelous material towards the church, using high-power loudspeakers at all times of day.
- Exercising its monopoly of the media at both the local and national level to spread propaganda aimed at Thai Ha Church and falsely accuse parishioners, brothers and priests of nefarious activities.
- Hiring thugs and facilitating their coming to the parish and church to intimidate brothers, priests and residents.
- Using organizations under the government's control to put pressure on the Church: veterans' associations, women clubs, youth groups, neighborhood organizations, patriotic front organizations, government units, etc.
- Ordering sympathizers or hirelings to provoke certain parishioners so that the police could make up a reason to arrest them, as in the detainment of Mr. Vũ Tiến Dũng.

The government has other means that it could resort to, if it continued to covet the people's property and suppress our legitimate aspirations. For example, it could use torture, terrorism and other means of physical and mental attacks. These are the "low blows" that an authoritarian regime has at disposal when it ignores justice, truth and peace.

The above-mentioned acts against Thai Ha Church and others have the effect of being divisive and deleterious to people's valuation of morality, the justice system, and our society's legal and spiritual framework. At the same time, such acts encourage opportunism, violence, dishonesty, hatred, etc. All this can only make society more depraved, the country less strong and stable, and our countrymen more miserable.

The government's policy results in more harm than good, with the "good" being limited to a few individuals' pocketbooks and the harm affecting the entire country. The government's massive expenditures on institutions and operations aimed at forcing its will on the people may not be good at all for the economy. The plight of Thai Ha Parish reflects the plight of our country and people.

The Chinese government has taken some of our land and laid claim to our islands in the South China Sea while arresting and killing Vietnamese fishermen whose boats operated in international waters. Chinese citizens entered our country to live illegally in enclaves that our government has little power over, and have become a nuisance for Vietnamese residents living nearby. Rather than protecting its own citizens whose rights are ignored by illegal Chinese settlers, our government focuses only on suppressing Thai Ha Parish and its residents who are Vietnamese. This is incomprehensible and illogical.

Why is the government so meek towards foreigners and so cruel towards the Vietnamese? If the government devoted only a tiny fraction of its energy and resources used in oppressing our parish towards promoting patriotism and resistance aimed at the encroaching Chinese, our historical threat, we would be nothing less than overjoyed.

### **THAI HA PARISHIONERS' MENTALITY**

As Saint Peter taught, we Catholics should feel the same way as Christ felt. While being persecuted, we should love and share in the sufferings of those who were arrested, detained or beaten; we should feel the pain of our families and community, of our entire people who are victimized by an unjust and unscrupulous regime. Moreover, we should love those who use force and lies to attack us because they and their loved ones cannot live as happy beings when they commit such acts. Their conscience cannot be at peace and they cannot be kind towards their loved ones when they are used to persecuting others. On their death beds, how could they leave this world in peace when their lives are marked by misdeeds? Following Jesus's example, let us pray to our Father to "forgive them for they know not what they do". We should also pray for their repentance because the Lord "does not take pleasure in the death of wicked people. He only wants them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live..."

Even as we suffer, we reaffirm the Lord's words "I am the way and the truth and the life." As believers in Jesus, we must persevere in upholding truth and life, bear the cross and suffer as Jesus did. We should recall Jesus's words "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers." "God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs." "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul." "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." "Take heart! I have overcome the world." "If we suffer, we will also reign with Him; if we die with Him, we will live with Him". "Truth will liberate you". As believers in our Lady of Thai Ha, let us recall the Virgin's teaching: "Let us live a just life in the presence of the Lord; He will deliver us from all our enemies".

Even when we are being attacked, we must not resort to violent acts and violent language. On the contrary, we must be civil and kind towards those who attack us. The Lord taught us to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." We should not lose our cool and be trapped in a circle of violence by a regime that worships force. We should recall God's warning: "Those who use the sword will die by the sword". When we live among those who are evil, we should heed Saint Peter's words, "let us shine like stars in the sky." We should show others that we value justice, love, truth and peace, and we want to live a life enriched by these values and share them with our people. We believe that the Vietnamese need such values to counter the effects of decades of lies and violence that shape our society in the mold of atheism and dialectic materialism.

In these difficult times, let us be joyful and sincere. Saint Paul said: "I remind you to feel joy in God." With God's help, we succeeded in this over the past years and pray that we will continue to live this way. In 2008, in the night of September 20 and early morning of September 21, in spite of the government's terrorist acts and threats against our lives, our church resonated with songs and laughter during the Mass in the afternoon of September 21 when we celebrated Saint Matthew's Day.

We know that the barrage of lies and false accusations could result in people misunderstanding our motive and acts, and realize that some among us could be sentenced in court. Jesus said that servants were not treated better than their master. So, if Jesus had been condemned to a tragic death, we as his servants should not expect to be spared. Therefore we should assert that we live with God, the master of history. There are truths that only He knows and truths that will be revealed by history. We should not let the propaganda campaign affect us. Let us re-affirm that we have not and will not do anything illegal. We can confidently state that we love our compatriots and our country, and that we are actively working on preserving and improving our country. We can affirm that we have been contributing to building and expanding what is good at the expense of evil and lies. We should be confident in carrying out our duty to help others learn the truth and follow the truth because truth will free us, according to the Lord.

During these difficult times, let us remain alert and wise: We should communicate with everyone we meet on an individual basis and explain the issue in a humble way. We should read each petition, announcement, document related to the Church's property that is posted on our bulletin board at the church or on the internet. We should tell everyone to access such information. Moreover, we should recall that the devil loves lies and darkness, and fears light, truth and transparency. So, let us remember what we started practicing over three years ago: **EACH BELIEVER IS A REPORTER OF THE PEOPLE** who can defend himself and help his brothers and sisters. As I write these words, Mr. Dũng, the person just arrested by the police on trumped up charges, came to my mind. In recent years he has been serving others in his dedicated, humble way in spite of being almost 70. When he had a few minutes, he read books in the parish's library and stood ready to help young people to get to know the library holdings. When he turned 70, he surprised us all by enrolling in a communication class in order to more effectively support the cause of justice and truth.

As defenders of justice and truth, when we come to the church or when we go to the police station, we should bring camcorders, cameras, tape recorders, pens and paper, or cell phones, if possible. We can record any scene that could be used to support justice, truth and peace, and then send it to appropriate destinations. This should be done when we see faces, acts, people making abrasive remarks, etc. For what purpose? To have evidence so that "the police can further investigate." We already know that a number of individuals and organizations specialize in inciting events and blaming them on others. We learned this firsthand during our Thai Ha struggle. We must know what to do. Otherwise our status as victims could change to defendants and eventually criminals. At night, please carry a small flashlight in case the power is turned off unexpectedly and bad elements show up in our community. If this happened, all believers should remain silent, squat down on the ground, and shine their flashlights towards the troublemakers while taking pictures, and/or using camcorders and tape recorders to record. There is no guarantee that these defensive tactics will always bring us justice, but they can limit our damages and reduce the bad elements' eagerness to do harm.

From 1945 until now, Thai Ha has been suffering for 66 years and will likely continue to be challenged for a long time. Yet we can take heart because God is with us and He will help us according to His plan. God is the master of history and the wicked people currently in power are not. History has taught us about faith and the eventual outcome of this kind of struggle. Saint Paul wrote: "If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Following the example set by Saint Francis of Assisi, we should know that "when one forgets about oneself, one meets oneself; when one dies, one will find everlasting life." Life is ephemeral; nobody lives

forever. To the Lord, a thousand years are just like a single day. We should live with eternal values, as human beings, with faith, love and hope, instead of living like animals and using force like them to solve issues.

The government said on many occasions that those religious organizations that collaborate with the Party will earn a place in the people's hearts and minds, and those members of the clergy and believers who collaborate will enjoy peace and prosperity. How did this turn out? In the North, some priests joined the Patriotic Catholic Committee, using Đa Minh Church (corner of Chùa Một Cột Street and Hùng Vương Street) as their base. After some years, the government seized the church for official use. In 2008 the government turned it into a restaurant/bar, ending the existence of a church that was known for its activities in the pre-1954 period. People should be very careful when hearing soothing propaganda from the regime before they become victims.

As a result of Thai Ha's upholding justice and truth, 2 brothers died in prison, 2 priests were exiled, 2 other priests were jailed, many parishioners were detained, including Mr. Thước who used to be an usher, drummer and bellringer at the church. In 2008 dozens of parishioners were arrested, hundreds were beaten and threatened, 6 were imprisoned, and 8 were put on trial and unjustly sentenced, not counting thousands whom the government tried to intimidate. These days nearly all of us in the parish have been terrorized, including Messrs. Lê Sơn and Vũ Tiến Dũng who were arrested.

Thai Ha has been the object of persecution during 66 years, but those who led these vicious campaigns came and went without a trace while Thai Ha still exists and persists in being witness to the Lord, justice, truth and peace. Saint Paul said "we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed." It is so true that the more willing we are to die with Christ, the more assured we can be that we will live with Him.

In Pope John Paul II's diary, he cited Pope Pius XI's words: *Poland could not be destroyed and Poland will not be destroyed because Poland believes and prays and Poland has Czestokhova Cathedral*. Both popes believed that Poland will outlive the Nazi and Communist invasions. Like their Holinesses, we believe that *Thai Ha Parish and its spirit of bearing witness will live on because we believe, we pray, and we have our Mother of Mercy's shrine*.

November 9, 2011

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Redemptorist Order.

Rev. Peter Nguyễn Văn Khải of the Redemptorist Order.

Figure 7.  
that he



*Rev. Nguyễn Hòa Hiệp – he died from a disease contracted while caring for sick people in 1945.*



Figure 8. *Rev. Nguyễn Khắc Cân – he lost one eye to a disease when he cared for the sick.*



Figure 8. *Rev. Nguyễn Kim Dong – he was killed when an airplane fired on him in Thường Tín while bringing patients to emergency care.*





Figure 9. Rev. Vũ Ngọc Bích – he remained in Northern Vietnam after 1954.



Figure 10. Brother Nguyễn Tấn Văn – he died in Yên Bái Prison.



Figure 11. *Brother Phạm Văn Đạt – he died in Công Trời Prison.*