



## *Sister's Stories Featuring*

# **Uyen-Chi Dang, acj**

*"God's desire for you is written in your life, in your personal history..."*

No person, no life, no vocation can be understood unless you have walked it with the other person. If we desire to do so, even here we can enter into the story of Sister Uyen-Chi and share part of her journey, as if reading the work of God between the lines of the chronological story. In the story of every person is an invitation to know and to love God.

The invitation that Sister Uyen-Chi felt to consider religious life was not as frightening as was the first nudging insight of the certainty of this calling. *"There is something there to which you can't put into words,"* she shares, but there exists an interior knowledge that says "this is who you are."

The possibility of a religious vocation had been present in Sister Uyen-Chi since her childhood, although she spoke of it to no one. Her family was very involved in the Catholic community, and word would spread too easily and quickly. The first time she shared this nudging desire was on her first Ignatian retreat, after she had graduated from college. She knew within that she needed to make a retreat, that she needed to respond to the stirring desires within her. *"I first spoke about my thoughts to a priest whom I thought I would never see again."* Free from pressure, Sister Uyen-Chi was able to receive the counsel of the priest, guidance in discernment about religious life. It was on this retreat that Uyen-Chi received the most valuable counsel in discerning God's desire for each of us: *"God's desire for you is written in your life, in your personal history. Examine that."*

Sister Uyen-Chi continued making the Spiritual Exercises with the same Jesuit priest for seven years. They were seven years of patient and serious discernment, not only towards her ultimate vocation, but also of the steps along the way. After the first retreat she desired to share more explicitly the gift of faith and became a catechist in her parish. Although she had had no prior teaching experience, teaching catechism awoke something greater within her. With a mathematics degree and the possibility of going on to medical school or for a Masters in engineering, Sister Uyen-Chi chose to go back to school to become a math teacher. Her religious vocation is evident even when she shares her experiences from her years of teaching, for it is the revelation of the gifts and the truth of each of her students that gave her most life.

She dedicated herself further to the life of the parish, and the more time and energy that she gave, the more life she felt. It was in this giving of herself that she knew more truthfully who she was, and gradually began to accept the truth of God's desire for her as a religious sister. The realization of her calling did not come as a flash, yet, as she shares, *"it became so clear. Never have I made a decision with such clarity."* Of course, the unknown was still a source of fear, but it was a fear that didn't run very deep. The truest experience was that of a deep, peaceful joy when she made the decision, a joy that she could not create on her own.

This deep joy confirmed the discernment, and she began another discernment of religious communities. Now, when sisters from other countries meet Uyen-Chi, they often comment: *"Oh! So you're the one who met us through the internet!"* With clarity about what was essential to her vocation, she began an initial search for a congregation on Google and entered "Ignatian spirituality + women religious". While there were many congregations that matched this search, what she saw in the Handmaids drew her to come to know more. *"What drew me to the Handmaids was the Eucharist."* In a deeply Ignatian congregation with the Eucharist as the center of our life, Sister Uyen-Chi knew she was called to be a Handmaid.