

## A community mourns

Family, friends bid farewell to mother, daughter who died in Sherman bus crash

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Sherman Bus Crash Funeral

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HOUSTON – Family and friends remember her as the smiling grandmother.

Family members carried her portrait in front of her casket as Cham Tran, 90, and her daughter Catherine Tran, 59, entered Our Lady of Lourdes Church, or Giao Xu Duc Me Lo Duc, in Houston on Saturday for the last time. The choir sang loudly to welcome back the once church members who lived in Port Lavaca. It would be the pair's final Mass within the church's white walls.

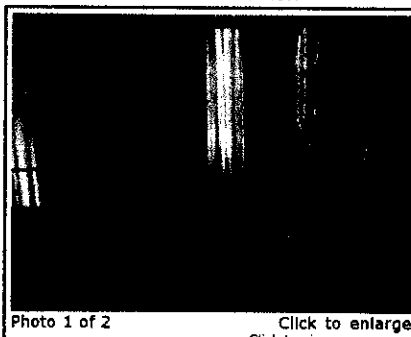


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Faces lit up to see Bich Ngoc Tran, 68, pushed in a wheelchair as part of the procession. Bich Ngoc, who suffered a broken arm and ribs, as well as fractured legs, was on the tour bus that crashed in Sherman, killing Cham, Catherine and 17 others on Aug. 8.

The Rev. Joseph Hoa Trinh, who celebrated the Mass while the gray clouds rolled over the church, couldn't forget that fateful morning. Trinh used to serve in Houston before moving to the St. Monica Church in Dallas.

He jumped out of bed after receiving a 2 a.m. phone call and drove to Sherman from McKinney, where he resides. He and another priest performed last rites for 12 people already dead at the highway scene.

"It was heartbreaking to see the scene like that," he said. "There were people I knew. I worked with them. They were very close to my heart."

Catherine and her mother, Cham, were the definition of selflessness, always helping others in their volunteer work with the Legion of Mary, a Catholic volunteer association, Trinh said.

Tears spilled from the eyes of the listeners, who continually kept their hands clasped or bowed, their heads in prayer while drying their faces.

"Everybody loves her," Loan Pham, 32-year-old granddaughter, said with wet eyes about Cham.

They would drive to Houston every weekend to attend Mass at the church, Pham said.

She looked at the hundreds of people who filled the church for Cham and Catherine. Her grandmother and aunt left plenty of memories and stories in each one of the church members, she said.

Loan asks for more prayer for her mother, Bich Ngoc, as she re-entered the hospital shortly after the end of the funeral Mass.

The family wore white head bands for mourning. The children wore yellow head bands to signal they were great-grandchildren.

In Vietnamese culture, the family would wear these head bands for three months, Ken Nguyen, an engineer from Katy who grieved the loss of his cousin's wife, said. Then, they place the head bands on the altar and pray for the souls that perished.

"Today, we're praying for them to find peace with God," Nguyen said.

The brother and uncle of the deceased, Doa G. Nguyen, thanked everyone for coming out to the funeral Mass. He emphasized that Cham and Catherine still led full lives even though the family suffers a huge loss. He choked up when speaking about them.

"He really misses them," Ken said. "It got really emotional."

U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, who represents the 18th District, presented the church with a letter of Congressional acknowledgment of grief. She bowed to the two white-robed caskets and portraits near the altar and shook as many family members hands as she could reach.

Upon leaving the church, the tears gushed out. Bich Ngoc wailed out in grief as she followed the coffins out of the church doors.

Lee watched.

"This was an enormous tragedy and from many of our perspectives, an unnecessary tragedy," Lee said. "I don't think our families should suffer this way."

Lee intends to introduce legislation for criminal penalties for owners that run companies that have a "total disregard for safety." The church's loss comes after the losses in Hurricane Katrina, she pointed out.

"Enough is enough," Lee said. "The federal government has to act. My deepest sympathies to this church and the entire Vietnamese community."

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