

Mourners remember Sherman bus crash victims

By ANA LEY Associated Press Writer © 2008 The Associated Press

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HOUSTON — More than 1,000 people gathered Wednesday at Our Lady of Lavang Parish to mourn the deaths of six church members killed after a motorcoach they were riding in blew a tire and skidded off the road and into an embankment on a pilgrimage.

Thanh Pham, whose friend's mother was among those who died, said that although the community is saddened by the loss of the six, the dead "are in a better place."

"They were all prepared to be there," Pham said.

The six were among 17 people who died early Friday when the bus carrying them to a religious festival in Missouri crashed near Sherman, near the Texas-Oklahoma border.

Pham said she will also miss Phero Phaolo Nguyen Than Khiem, who was an adviser for a youth group she was involved in at the church.

"He always takes care of us," she said, her voice shaking. "He is like a father to all of us."

The 23-year-old said she traveled from the Grand Cayman Islands, where she is going to medical school, after she heard about the

accident.

Mourners wept before photos of Phuy Pham Thu, a 27-year-old who was president of the youth group at the church.

"When I first moved (to Houston) from Victoria, she was the first friend I met," Pham said. "She was too sweet, always volunteering."

Theresa Thuong, 14, remembered her as "very beautiful, very religious."

"She was very religious, very religious," the 14-year-old said. "She sang in the choir. She does a lot of helpful things around here."

Wilburn Wright, a chairman for the American Red Cross' mental health division in Houston, also attended the vigil to speak to relatives and friends affected by the accident.

"The family, for the most part, has been very quiet, though they seem to be coping," Wright said. "I think it's just the culture of the Asian people to be very reserved."

Although the ceremony was held in Vietnamese, one reverend shared a few words with the English-speaking community.

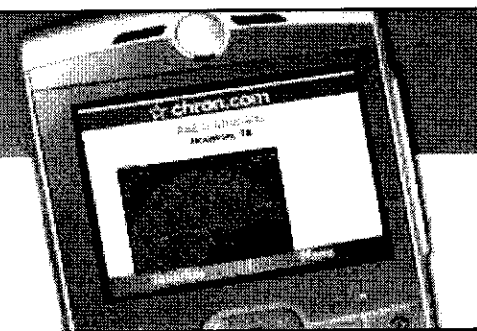
"We pray for those who have died and those who are in the hospital," said the Rev. Dominic Huy The Trinh. "We thank you for joining us in the prayers, which are the most important part."

The vigil was one of several held at churches in Houston on Wednesday.

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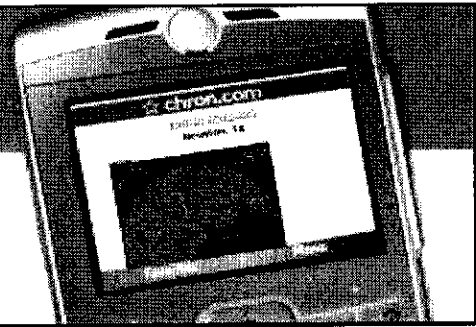
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Our Lady of Lavang will hold funeral services for the six victims on Saturday.

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