

Religion

Family members of the bus crash victims in Sherman pray during funeral services at Vietnamese Martyrs Church on Saturday, Aug. 16, 2008, in Houston.
 JULIO CORTEZ/CHRONICLE



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Aug. 16, 2008, 9:43PM

Tears flow at bus crash victims' Houston-area funerals

By DALE LEZON AND DAI HUYNH

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Grief spilled out in tears at funerals Saturday for many of the 17 church members killed when their bus crashed in Sherman earlier this month.

Thousands of mourners from Houston's Vietnamese community paid final respects at several services at area Catholic churches. Standing before closed caskets draped in white, they eulogized lost friends and relatives.

"God saw five beautiful roses and he plucked them to display in his house in heaven," said Hai Tran, a church council member at the Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church in southeast Houston.

Five were honored at the Martyrs, while six more were remembered at Our Lady of Lavang in northwest Houston. Three others were eulogized at Our Lady of Lourdes on Fairbanks-North Houston Road.

Hundreds of mourners crowded into pews and chairs on the main floor and the balcony of the Martyrs. Nearly 100 others milled outside in the heat or peered through windows as Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza presided over Mass for Minh-Hao Thi Vo, Xuan-Hoa Thi Dang, Soi Thi Pham, Nhung Thi Cao and Vivica Phung Kim Nguyen.

The women's caskets were lined in a semicircle near the altar. Dozens of red, white and yellow flower arrangements, as well as the women's framed photographs, adorned the altar.

"We gather here in great sorrow, but we also gather in great faith," Fiorenza told the crowd. "They will be given a high place in heaven next to (the Virgin) Mary, their mother."

Meanwhile, Our Lady of Lavang commemorated the lives of Khiem Thanh Nguyen, Hanh Viet Nguyen, Xuan Thi Nguyen, Thuy-Thu Pham Vu, Boi Van Nguyen and Dung Thi Hoang.

Wearing white linen head bands and coarse cloth hoods to signify their reverence for the dead, family members clung to each other for support as they recalled the morning of the bus accident on Aug. 8.

"It's an easy day to remember, now," said Luong Uong, a Holy Ghost Catholic Church priest whose 84-year-old uncle, Boi Nguyen, was among those eulogized at Our Lady of Lavang.

"I received a phone call, telling me about the accident. I couldn't believe, too stung to be certain that I had heard correctly. I remembered talking to God. I'm scared. I'm scared to look at my friends and those I love with their eyes closed."

The bus had been taking 55 people from several Houston-area churches to an annual festival to honor the Virgin Mary in Carthage, Mo.

The crash happened about 12:45 a.m. on U.S. 75 near the North Texas town.

Investigators say a front tire blew out and the bus smashed through a guardrail, toppled from a bridge and slid down an embankment.

Twelve people died at the crash site. Five more died in hospitals. Dozens were injured.

Parish in mourning

Many of the survivors hobbled on crutches or were pushed in wheelchairs to the funeral Masses. Even church members who did not know someone who died said they felt like they had lost part of their family.

"We consider it a mourning for the whole parish," said the Rev. Joseph Vu, the Martyrs' pastor. "These people were very active in the whole parish. Now, we see they are departed from us, and it is a part of our body gone away."

After the Masses, mourners were drenched in a downpour as they left the churches to attend the burial services at Earthman-Resthaven cemetery on North Freeway, Brookside Funeral Home cemetery on F.M. 1960 West and

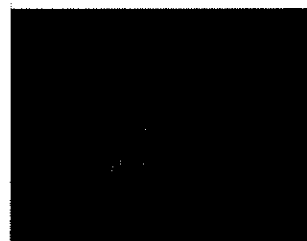
RESOURCES

1-866-GET-INFO

The Red Cross hot line for information for family members

903-217-7651

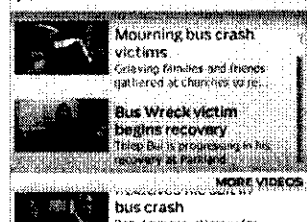
The Sherman Police Department number for family members wishing to claim property from the bus



Mourning bus crash victims

Grieving families and friends gathered at churches to remember victims of the bus crash that killed 17. Video by Jason Witmer and Steve Buckert. Edited by Jason Witmer. August 16, 2008.

00:00



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 Victims' long, hard road to recovery

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Both sadness and hope dominate Sunday services

Officials begin interviewing bus passengers

Forest Park East cemetery on East Gulf Freeway.

"This is a good thing," said Lavang assistant pastor Giuse Do Vang Chung.

"In Vietnam, water is a fortuitous sign. It's God's blessings poured in abundant to show his love for those who have died. It's also to remind us that life continues because to live, we need water."

Beneath gray clouds and a light drizzle, family and friends huddled under tents.

Survivors attend

At the service for Vivica Phung Kim Nguyen at Forest Park East cemetery, Vietnamese religious music played softly from a tape player. Incense scented the air as her husband, Scott Tran, 31, slumped in a wheelchair while clutching the couple's 4-year-old son.

Their daughter, 9, stood beside him holding a framed photograph of her mother. Tran held three fresh pink roses.

Tran had been aboard the bus when it crashed. He suffered broken ribs, and doctors had to perform an appendectomy on him. He was released from a Dallas hospital Friday to attend his wife's service and arrived here last night. He expects to be admitted to a Houston hospital to continue his recovery.

His cousin, his sister-in-law and her mother were also injured in the accident.

"I'm trying to be brave and take care of all of this," he said.

Dozens of arrangements surrounded her grave. As the casket was lowered, Tran slumped forward and dropped his pink roses.

"She was a very happy person, gracious, generous," said Tran's cousin Thanh Hoang, 21, of Pasadena. "She loved to help."

Meanwhile, at the burial services at Earthman-Resthaven, a voice was missing. For years, Khiem Thanh Nguyen has led the prayers at countless burial services at Our Lady of Lavang.

"But not today, or ever again," said Paul Ngo as he watched his father-in-law's casket being lowered.

Burial services were also performed Saturday for Our Lady of Lourdes' members Phu Van Bui, Catherine Yen Thi Tran and Cham Thi Nguyen.

Chronicle staff member The' Pham contributed to this report.

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Festival-goers pay respects as they return home

Sherman crash angers those fighting for bus reforms

Festival attendees keep faith despite accident

Loved ones recall victims' strength and sacrifices

6 years after Terrell crash, experts see little bus reform

Officials release names of dead from Sherman bus crash

911 calls reveal shock of bus-crash survivors, passers-by

Authorities: Retreaded tire blew on bus that crashed

Bus operator has lengthy history of driver, safety violations

Church members gather and hold Mass for victims

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Recent fatal bus crashes over the past five years in Texas

Pastor tells bus-crash-victim mourners to trust in God

Shadow hangs over annual Vietnamese Catholic festival

Hospitals tending to injured bus crash victims

Families recount bus victims' lives, devotion to faith

Photos: Scenes from the deadly accident

Photos: Grief, prayer and a search for answers

Graphic: An illustrated look at how the crash happened

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**atocean wrote:**

There was a very similar bus crash in the UK today (18th)http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/7569112.stmLuckily only 1 fatality.....but the law in the UK requires (shoulder lap) seat belts for all bus passengers.Perhaps a learning.

8/18/2008 6:33 PM CDT

[Recommend](#)[Report abuse](#)**hickson182 wrote:**

I would like to send my deepest sympathy to the families of the crash victims. Just to let you all know that my family will be including you all in our daily prayers. Three years ago we lost three very close members of my family in three weeks. So we can say that we have a fair idea of the deep sorrow and the pain that you all experiencing. I thank God that you are a very closely knit community as it's times like this that you appreciate the members of your family and church friends. My heart goes out to you all and we will be including you all in our Rosary Group every Monday morning. We have a very strong Catholic Vietnamese community here in Brisbane and I always enjoy attending their liturgies. Please be assured that you are all in our daily prayers & thoughts. Lots of love & prayers. Anna Hickson & Family. Brisbane, AustraliaAll Our Love, Sympathy & Prayers.

8/18/2008 2:23 AM CDT

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8/18/2008 2:22 AM CDT

[Recommend](#)[Report abuse](#)**Ruby88 wrote:**

A MESSAGE TO ALL VICTIMS' FAMILIES & SURVIVORS: God loves you and your family, and He will always be with you. GOD IS IN TOTAL CONTROL of whatever happens in our lives. He knows what we are all going through and will never ever take delight in our sufferings. But sometimes, God allows the greatest suffering, the deepest sorrow, and the most painful events as well as the happiest moments, the most joyful times and glorious days to happen in our lives for a REASON. All things happen in accordance to His Divine Plan. God is converting and transforming everything that happens to us into graces that purifies our souls. He is moulding us into a person He wants us to become and to draw us closer to Him. Our trust and faithfulness to God will bear fruits known only in Heaven. He is pouring graces and blessings to your families right now. "BE STRONG & TAKE COURAGE, DO NOT FEAR OR BE DISMAYED FOR THE LORD WILL GO BEFORE YOU & HIS LIGHT WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY".

8/17/2008 11:01 AM CDT

[Recommend \(5\)](#)[Report abuse](#)**PISCESJH wrote:**

Prayers to all. God will give you the strength to get through this.

8/17/2008 9:16 AM CDT

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