

Dear Fr. Winter,

Here is the info about Fr. Nespolo I can gather:

From 1977 to mid 1980 there were about 12,000 Hmong immigrants living in Fresno CA. Beside Hmong Animism, Catholicism was the primary faith among the Hmong hence the works of the Missionaries in Laos (Oblates and MEP - Missions Étrangères de Paris).

Once in Fresno, Hmong Catholics did not have a place to gather so they sought the basement of Sacred Heart Church as a gathering and worshiping place. Couple leaders such as Nelson Yang and Davone Yang were working closely with the Parish and the Bishop office to fulfill the needs of the community. The difficulties of integration, the worship in a different language and the language barrier presented a real challenge for the community. The Parish and the Bishop's office had few alternatives.

The community and the Parish came together with the leadership of Nelson Yang (who was a student under the direction of Fr. Umberto Nespolo (Txiv Plig Nkaj Xyaum) in Sayaboury Laos) and Davone Yang who was a student in Fr. Nespolo school in Laos to seek ways to meet the spiritual needs of the Hmong Catholics. It was clear that the Hmong really needed a Priest who speaks the language and knows the culture.

Nelson and Davone were baptized in Laos and ministered by the Italian Oblates. They knew Fr. Nespolo very well in Laos because he used to minister to them. At the request of the community, Nelson then approached Bishop José de Jesús Madera Uribe, for the possibility of requesting the help of Fr. Nespolo. The Bishop granted the request of the community and shortly after that Fr. Nespolo got reunited with the Hmong in Fresno CA in 1984.

In California, Fr. Nespolo's ministry to the Hmong was a real challenge because CA is a big State. Fr. Nespolo not only ministered to those in Fresno but all Hmong Catholics in CA and also in those in the neighboring States particularly Washington. Like Fr. Tailleux in the Midwest, Fr. Nespolo covered many dioceses, driving across many cities and States. For example in CA, he ministered to the faithful from Sacramento to San Diego and in WA from Portland to Seattle.

Beside Masses, his ministry includes:

- Baptism
- Confirmation
- Confession
- Marriage
- The sick and the dying

Fr. Nespolo understood the needs of the community and had a great vision to sustain those needs. He wanted to:

- Create a Hmong Catholic Center in Fresno to provide assistance and resources for other communities
- Promote vocation to religious life
- Forming Lay ministers
- Forming Catechist
- Promote vocation to the Diaconate

Fr. Nespolo also ministered to the Lao and Khamu. He is also fluent in their languages. He speaks Lao better than Hmong

Fr. Nespolo had a heart condition and was not able to fulfill his dream. He had heart surgery in March of 2010 and returned to his home in Italy on March 12 of 2010.

Fr. Nespolo drove more than 4 hours to marry Joua and I at St. Martin the Porres in Yorba Linda CA on June 12, 1992.

Here are a few links for additional info.

<https://dioceseoffresno.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Catholic-Life-09-September-2015-web.pdf>

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/ACQHQLQNS7SFK80>

Thank you for your work on this. If you need info on Fr. Tailleux, let me know. I spoke with Fr. Luc and he sounded good. Be sure of our prayers.

Kou Ly.