

16th-century statue of Infant Jesus finds new home with Alberta Carmelites

After travelling from Italy to Portugal to China, a 500-year-old wooden statue of the Infant Jesus has reached its final destination – a Carmelite monastery west of Edmonton.

The 16th-century statue depicts Christ as a child wearing a red gown, golden cape and crown. The Tang family has donated it to the [Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph](#) located near Spruce Grove.

For Cacilda Tang, the Infant Jesus is a cherished symbol of her family's faith and dedication to prayer. Tang went so far as to call it a childhood friend.



Cacilda Tang

"I remember the times when my mother would carry me and put me in front of the Infant Jesus, telling me to throw a kiss to him," Tang said.

"I loved that. I was so small I could only see him face to face when my mother carried me. I would talk to him, pray to him, and, being the youngest of seven children, I took him as a playmate."

The Discalced Carmelites are a cloistered, contemplative order of nuns. Receiving the Infant Jesus statue is a real blessing for them, said Rev. Mario Fernandes, a Carmelite priest who directs the nearby [Mount Carmel Spirituality Centre](#). He sees the statue as a powerful reminder of how Christ teaches us to be like children in our own spiritual journey.

The statue had been in the Tang family since the 1940s, when Cacilda's mother, Celeste Vong, found it at a second-hand store in Macau, a former Portuguese colony in China. It is believed the statue made its way from Italy to Macau through Portuguese merchants who travelled and traded in the Orient. It is nearly identical to the Infant Jesus statue on display in the [Discalced Carmelite Church of Our Lady Victorious](#) in Prague.

Tang and her family brought the statue with them when they immigrated to Canada in the 1960s. Their father, Horacio do Conceicao, built an altar for it in the living room, where the family would kneel and pray the rosary every evening.

"Our parents taught us to have great devotion to the Infant Jesus, and to know how our family has been so blessed by the Lord," Tang said.

Because of their deep reverence for the Infant Jesus, the family vowed to give the statue only to a convent or monastery. They had even turned down \$3,000 from the University of British Columbia, which wanted it for their Department of Ancient Studies.

The Tangs decided to donate the statue to the Discalced Carmelite nuns near Edmonton when the family moved to Western Canada. The nuns have sown new red and gold garments for the statue to replace clothing other Carmelites made for the statue when the family originally bought it.

The figure was blessed by Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith on Aug. 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the day the Church honours the assumption of Mary's body and soul into heaven on the day of her death.