

Guy Lavallée, O.M.I. (1939-2014)

Père Guy Lavallée, was a Métis Oblate priest born at St. Laurent, Manitoba, the son of Pierre Lavallee (b. 1884) and Madeleine Beauchamp (b.1891), both from St. Laurent. He was the youngest of fourteen children. Both parents spoke Saulteaux and Michif French. In addition, his father spoke Swampy Cree and was often brought in to Winnipeg hospitals to act as an interpreter for northern Cree-speaking patients. His father was a hunter, fisherman, and blacksmith.



Père Guy was affectionately known as “Pchi Père.” He had a lifelong concern with the preservation of the Michif-French language and collecting Elders’ historical and lifeways accounts. He grew up in St. Laurent, Manitoba where he attended elementary school. He went to the Juniorat de Saint-Boniface and Le Collège Mathieu in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan for his high school and classical course. In 1960, he entered the Oblate Father’s noviciate in St. Norbert, Manitoba. He studied Philosophy and Theology at the Scholasticate in Lebret, Saskatchewan and at St. Paul’s University in Ottawa.

Father Lavallée was ordained as an Oblate priest in his home parish on July 6, 1968. Early in his career he ran Winnipeg’s core area St. John Bosco Centre (1968-1971)¹ and served as a director of the Winnipeg Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, where he was honoured by having his picture posted on their “Wall of Fame.” During the summer of 1971 he was Director of the Indian Pavilion at *Man and His World—Expo ’67*, in Montreal. Following this, he went to St. Mary’s church at Fort Frances, Ontario. He then returned to Montreal and from 1972-74 was Director of the Catholic Foreign Missions Office and working part-time for the National Indian Brotherhood. From 1974 to 1977 Father Lavallée was pastor at OO-ZA-WE-QWAN training centre at Rivers, Manitoba,

¹ In 1971 the Winnipeg Regional office of the MMF was located in the St. John Bosco Centre, the director was Norval Desjarlais assisted by field organizers Ralph McDougal, Joe Breland and Allan Dumas.

and also served as pastor to the Rolling River and Sioux Valley Reserves.

Father Guy was a founding member of the Manitoba Métis Federation; he and the Reverend Adam Cuthand were elected as the first two board members from the Winnipeg Region. He was also a special assistant to Angus Spence, the President, at the provincial level. He is also a founding member of the Native Council of Canada and the World Council of Indigenous People (1974). In 1992, he was named the official priest for the Métis National Council.

Father Guy has served in numerous country and urban parishes over the years. He holds a Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of British Columbia and has taught Native Studies at several Canadian Universities. He is the author of, *Prayers of a Métis Priest: Conversations With God on the Political Experiences of the Canadian Métis, 1992-1994* (St Boniface, Manitoba: Author, 1997) and *The Metis of St. Laurent, Manitoba: Their Life and Stories, 1920-1988* (St Boniface, Manitoba: Author, 2003).



PERE LAVALLEE

FR. GUY LAVALLEE, O.M.I. 1939 - 014 Peacefully, Father Guy Lavallée passed away on October 25, 2014, at St. Boniface Hospital, at the age of 74. Besides his religious family, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he leaves to mourn his sister Anna Devlin, as well as many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his parents Pierre et Madeleine Lavallée (née Beauchamp), his brothers Jules, Frédérick and Paul, his sisters Berthe, Maria, Evelyn Foster-New, Sr. Irène, f.m.m., Hélène, Délima, Jeanne, Laurette and a baby deceased at birth. Guy was born in St. Laurent, MB on November 15, 1939. He pronounced his first vows in St. Norbert, MB on August 15, 1961, his perpetual vows on September 8, 1964 in Lebret, SK and was ordained on July 6, 1968 in St. Laurent. The Oblates and the Lavallée family wish to thank Father Guy's friends and the personnel at the Palliative Care Service at St. Boniface Hospital and Despina Residence for their care and devotion. Funeral liturgy will be celebrated on Friday, October 31, 2014 at 10:30 a.m. at St. Boniface Cathedral, presided by Most Reverend Albert LeGatt. Viewing will start at 10:00 a.m. The liturgy will be followed by cremation. The burial of ashes will take place in St. Laurent Parish cemetery on Tuesday, November 4 at 2:00 p.m.

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“Too often we do not know how to deal with cultural change”

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Guy Lavalle, OMI

Guy is strong, determined, loud and very affirmative in what he believes and stands for. One hour with this man and you know that he is passionate about his faith, his Oblate commitment, his Metis identity and the power of goodness in people we too often overlook. A strong part of his identity is his connection with his Métis community and his roots in Manitoba. Guy is very comfortable with his identity and leaves no doubt about who he actually is.

Guy's history is very varied and challenging. He was born November 15, 1939, in St. Laurent, Manitoba. He travelled a little South to make his novitiate in St. Norbert (1960); scholasticate in Lebreton, 1961-65; a pastoral year in St. Norbert (1966) followed by ordination in July 06, 1968. His years of formation were through the turbulent years immediately following the Second Vatican Council.

His first assignment was to the St. John Bosco Indian Metis Cultural Center in Winnipeg. This was an outreach to the native community within the inner city. In 1971 he took on the position as director of the Indian Pavilion in Montreal. This was a continuation from Expo 67 and carried on for several years with government and church backing. In 1972 he took a term position to help the organization Entraide Missionarie in their transition. The next three years he served as pastor of the parishes of Rivers, Sioux Valley and Rolling River, Manitoba. He was also involved in Oo-za-we-kwan First Nation Training Center. Between the years of 1971-78 Guy worked with the National Brotherhood in Ottawa on a contract basis to help establish the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Georgetown, Guyana.

From here he served as pastor of Ashern and part time chaplain at Canadian Forces at Gypsumville (a radar station). He also served the communities of Lake Manito Reserve, Volgen, Jack Head, Peguis and McLean Island Métis Community. In 1983 he was

appointed pastor of the parish in Thompson, Manitoba.

In 1985 he began studies which lead to a Master's Degree in Anthropology. From 1988-1996 he taught native studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon and St. Paul's in Ottawa in the missiology department. During all these period Guy conducted research and documentation in Native studies, Métis History and the Oblate missions.

In 1996-2002 he returned to Manitoba to the parish in Woodlands and St. Ambrose, Manitoba. The years 2004 saw his appointment as parish priest in St. Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba. In 2009 he received his latest assignment to the Despins Community to look after the medical needs of the elderly Oblates. He chuckles when he describes himself as the "official taxi" around here.

The year 2002-03 was a sabbatical year which provided Guy with significant insights. "It was an excellent experience." He left for India to explore inter-religious dialogue. He joined the Nahrom Hindu Movement house of prayer in India. During this sabbatical year he visited about ten different ashrams and spent a week to a month in each place. His presence was an active presence, not a detached observer on the sidelines. He prayed with them, and shared in their ritual ceremonies and chants.

In preparation for this sabbatical Guy had discussed his plans with our Oblate General, G. Steckling. He had informed Fr. Steckling that "my objective is to learn from within the Hindu culture and their spirituality. What are the different expressions of their prayer life?" Steckling also added that Guy was the "only Oblate that approached it from that perspective."

One experience that left a profound impression was his visit to one of the main gurus in the ashram. "I wanted to learn how to pray and what symbols and ceremonies they would use?" The first question he asked me was, "Do you feel comfortable in your Catholic priesthood?" I said, "Yes." There followed a second question. "Are you happy in your celibacy?"

"If you are not happy with your priesthood and celibacy you do not belong here. You will have to go home and address your problem at home and then you can come here." Then he accepted me and I visited ten ashrams over the period of then months.

"This has truly been the highlight of my life."

"Inter-religious dialogue does not start from integrating two spiritualities but to respect each other's spiritualities. When one particular Westerner began to wear the orange saffron robe of the Hindu monk the guru asked, 'Who gave you permission to use that?' 'We do not use your chasubule when we pray!' "

Pensively Guy continued to outline his learning experience. "There is a challenge in trying to integrate the symbols of the different spiritualities. Based on my experience in India, a spiritual symbol that is significant and relevant in a given culture is not necessarily significant and relevant in other cultures. Each culture has it own internal

logic of proceeding and operating.

This learning experience challenged Guy to give second thought to some of our missionary strategies. “We assume that we have the right to go into a culture and change it in the name of Christ. Christianity provides the means for people to change themselves with the message that the Gospel offers. In accepting Christianity it means that people must reappropriate their cultural, spiritual traditions and identity. This will always be a challenge for all Oblates all over the world to have a group of missionaries strategize over cultural change. Too often we do not know how to deal with cultural change.” He concluded this sharing of his reflection affirming “the truth is there. We have to find it!”



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