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Joy in Christ
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Jubilee 100 Biography Project

Biography of Rev. Leo Cordeau

Submitted by Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Vermillion

Affectionately known as “Pere” by his hockey teammates, Rev. Father Leo Cordeau made a lasting impression and left a concrete legacy in Vermillion’s Holy Name of Jesus Parish during his tenure there from 1977 to 1984.

Father Cordeau played forward with the local recreation hockey league, and his skilful play was a welcome addition to his team. Although he is an avid Montreal Canadiens fan, he endeared himself to local fans by cheering for the Oilers too. But it is Father Cordeau’s simple faith that is most remembered by the parishioners, some of whom still remain in touch with him through phone calls and visits. Father Cordeau never worried about where needed funds would be found; he simply believed that God would provide the means to do necessary tasks, and he was right!

One of these tasks was the construction of an addition to the local Catholic school, St. Jerome’s. Father saw that the church’s hall was not adequate, and spearheaded a drive to build not only a functional church hall, but an additional space for the school. The name of the addition is a testament to his involvement: the Father Cordeau Centre.

Father Cordeau’s commitment to providing the opportunity for his parishioners to share the Body and Blood of Christ was evidenced in the extra masses that he said to accommodate families who were away for the weekend, whether for their children’s sporting events or family visits. A soft-spoken man, Father had a way of encouraging non-practicing Catholics to come to church, and once there, they (and everyone else) would benefit from his gentle nuggets of faith-filled wisdom. The pews gradually filled to overflowing.

Many parishioners comment on Father Cordeau’s special talent for making connections. He was a master at connecting people with each other, perhaps because he learned of an ethnic, historical, geographic, or talent-related common reference point between them. He could also not only recognize a match between a person and his or her particular skill set, but he could also deftly convince this person to use the skill for the benefit of the Church. Father introduced the Christopher Leadership Course to the Parish and attended all the sessions—perhaps this was the source of the useful information about his parishioners!

When asked what springs to mind about Father Cordeau, one parishioner remarked about visual images they recall. One such image is Father surrounded by the 15 or so altar servers, most taller than him, at the altar. Many of these servers continued their service until graduating from high school, a fact reminiscent of Father’s own extended relationship with Archbishop Emeritus Joseph MacNeil as altar server, protégé, and friend. Another image is of Father arranging for the power to “go out” just as it was his turn to speak at the Christopher Course, then lighting a candle to reinforce the point he was making about the Light of Christ.

Father was, during his time in Vermillion, himself a light. He lit the way for parish unity through his humility, social nature, and sense of humour. It has been reported that Father would turn up for brief visits at the door of various parishioners’ homes.



He learned a few words of Polish and Ukrainian to please the elderly speakers of those languages. In his mind every parishioner was an equally valuable member of the Church community, and he treated them as such. A priest who participated in the larger community of Vermilion, he was a frequent and welcomed visitor to St. Jerome's School, where he would perhaps not remember a student's name, but would connect her to a family: "You're a Ganton, right?" He is described as a "servant who was also a great boss," and "a responsible boss," and "a leader by example."

While in Vermilion, Father travelled to celebrate Mass in Mannville and Islay, two missions which are now closed. Father Cordeau still celebrates Mass in St. Edmund's Parish in Edmonton where he currently serves as pastor, and occasionally makes a visit for a golf game or a special event in Vermilion. He celebrated the 50th Anniversary of his ordination on June 16, 2012.