

Lavoie showed his leadership skills in many ways

By Judy Lavoie

I first met Sylvain when we were both teenagers. He has been my friend ever since, even more so when I married his older brother Louis in 1968. We not only continued our friendship, he then became my brother. Louis and I have grown from Sylvain's sacrament as he has from our sacrament of matrimony.

Sylvain is a born leader, as demonstrated early when he became president of the St. Thomas Moore College student council at the University of Saskatchewan after serving for a year as the social representative. At that point, searching in his life, he left university and joined Up With People -- a youth organization using music and good works to encourage cross-cultural understanding among people. He travelled with this group throughout the United States and Europe for almost a year.

I was in the hospital with our first daughter Chantel when we received a letter stating he was in Arnprior, Ont., where he had entered the novitiate to become an Oblate. He returned to Battleford for several years to attend the seminary at St. Charles Scholasticate. This enabled us to continue and strengthen our friendship and family bonds.

Sylvain was ordained a priest on Oct. 19, 1974, at St. Thomas College in North Battleford. How proud and pleased his parents were on that day. We all feel blessed to have a priest in the family. We were honoured that our youngest daughter, Solange, was the first child he baptized and that he is our daughter Kelye's godfather.

It was always a thrill for our children, eventually four in number, to be visited and entertained by Uncle Sylvain who doted on them and always had time for them. Our kids loved his attention, funny stories and songs and the fact he did not have a wife or children to share the attention he showered on them. Family has always been important for Sylvain. He finds time for siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins and his numerous friends. He believes very strongly in community.

Father Sylvain has the gentleness and patience of his mother, Claire and the drive and persistence of his father, Diogene. Father Sylvain became involved in marriage encounter and engaged encounter after Louis and I took a marriage encounter weekend and shared our excitement with him. He was instrumental in bringing the movement to northern communities.

We have had many occasions to laugh and cry together as family. Father Sylvain is always up front and open and encourages us not only to be ourselves but to share who we are to each other and to others. Some years after his parents had died, he organized a family retreat at the family farmhouse for the members of

the family so that they could share their stories, get to know each other better, and pray together as a family.

Throughout the years Father Sylvain was always the first to be called on in good times and difficult times. Weddings, anniversaries and baptisms were times of joy and celebration. When there were deaths in the family, sickness or other challenges he reached out to all with compassion and caring.

I especially appreciated his help during my husband's emergency surgery for a malignant brain tumour while on holiday last October. At 4 a.m. the only person I called was Father Sylvain. I knew that this man of prayer and faith would storm heaven for us. He also came to Toronto and prayed with Louis throughout two nights, keeping vigil at his brother's bedside.

Father Sylvain is a man of many talents and gifts and he has pursued them at different times in his life. His talents include those of an artist, photographer, musician, writer, gardener and counsellor. He has travelled widely and is always interested in learning new things and meeting new people.

He reaches out to people that many would have nothing to do with: the prisoner, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the sexual abuser and the mentally ill -- in other words, the forgotten and the poor.

When you are with Father Sylvain you always feel special and unique. He is humble and kind to all who meet him.

We are proud of him for his latest call but also feel a bit sad as it means we will have to share him more with others whom he so freely serves with joy.