

# Lavoie loves to see people grow spiritually

**By Kurt Stang, OMI**

Father Sylvain Lavoie had already been ordained an Oblate priest for 20 years serving in First Nations ministry by the time I had my first ministry experience with him in the North Battleford area in the summer of 1994.

The first 15 of those 20 years he spent in the vast area of Keewatin-Le Pas Archdiocese. As God would have it, after starting his ministry in the Keewatin-Le Pas Archdiocese as a young Oblate priest he now returns some 30 years later to serve as coadjutor archbishop.

Much of my formative years as an Oblate were spent with Father Sylvain. Soon after I began training with him it became clear that he was an Oblate missionary who was energetic, generous, and willing to serve God through his ministry and community life. I cannot measure the positive impact he had on my vocation as an Oblate.

I remember the first week I spent with him visiting some people at a wake on the Red Pheasant First Nation. He shook hands not only with the people he knew but also with all the people he hadn't met before. At first I wondered if he was "all there" but later I realized that this, his warm and friendly pastoral approach, was effective in connecting with and relating to the people. He has a great facility to meet the people and he puts in a great effort to understand them through the study of their language and participating of their cultural events.

Father Sylvain has a heart that loves to see people grow in a holistic way. He was instrumental in getting the Christopher Leadership Course going in the north of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba. His eyes light up and he is energized when he gives this course to help people realize their dignity as they learn public speaking skills. I've seen him practically "floating" around the room in joy and wonder after handing the graduates their certificates at the closing ceremony.

He also loves to see people grow spiritually. He facilitated many prayer groups in people's homes where there was no formal church building in the area. And he enjoys playing the guitar and singing to give "heart" to the prayer. To top this off he is known to get the whole prayer group roaring with laughter as he creatively throws in a joke here and there between songs.

And then there is the type of ministry Father Sylvain loves the most -- healing ministry. He has worked tirelessly for 30 years giving 12-step workshops and retreats. Some of his favourite phrases are "We are as sick as our deepest secrets" and "We can't heal what we can't feel." People in the 12-step movement from all around know and love Father Sylvain.

In all of this Father Sylvain somehow finds time for leisure. He does, however, have to schedule in a day off and sometimes this day off is so organized it seems to me to defeat the purpose of a day off. Yet, he enjoys it and "gets away from work" and that's what is important. He swims for fitness and enjoys sail boarding.

I remember one time setting off with Father Sylvain to go kayaking and sail boarding. Rain clouds were moving in and I suggested we turn back and try another day. Father Sylvain insisted on finishing what he set out to do. He got soaking wet from the rain, fell in the water several times from the strong wind and in the end he said, "That was great."

I looked at him and just smiled. I wasn't about to take the "wind out of his sails."

Father Sylvain loves to work with a team. Whether it be visiting people, giving a 12-step retreat, or shopping for groceries, he loves to do it with someone. He's an extrovert and is energized by people. Yet he does not shy away from solitude.

I know him to be a prayerful person who takes an hour of silent prayer every morning and a silent day away on poustinia every month. God can do great work with someone like Father Sylvain.