

In Memoriam

A foreign missionary, World War II survivor, and 'Caribbean man'

Redemptorist Father Albert Lamote, a Belgian who devoted his priestly ministry to the people of the Caribbean, died Tuesday, Jan. 12, at a nursing home in Dominica. Father Lamote, who had survived a German prison camp, was 97 years old.

Father Albert Joseph Francis Xavier Lamote, the son of Alberic and Helena Vangaver Lamote, was born Jan. 7, 1913, in St. Kruis Village, West Flanders, Belgium. He joined the Brussels Province of the Redemptorists, taking his first profession of vows in 1934 and his final profession in 1937. He studied at the University of Louvain and was ordained to the priesthood on Dec. 20, 1941, a year after the Nazi Army invaded and began to occupy Belgium.



Many years later, Father Lamote confided to Father Lawrence Lover the story of how he had been imprisoned by the Nazis, marked for execution, and freed just the day before his scheduled death. Father Lamote attributed his timely liberation to the intercession of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and for the rest of his life was unflinching in promoting devotion to her.

In 1948, the Brussels Provincial Superior assigned him to work in the Vice-Province of Roseau, which was based in Dominica and included several other islands. A decade later, when his compatriot, Father Charles Vermeulen, was sent out to Roseau, the trip still took 11 days by sea, he said, and the ship was too large to dock on the tropical island. The last part of the journey was by small boat from ship to shore, Father Vermeulen explained.

For the first 30 years of Father Lamote's ministry in the Caribbean, Dominica was a colony of Great Britain, gaining its independence only in 1978. By 1985, the Province of Brussels could no longer staff and support the Vice-Province of Roseau and asked the Redemptorist General Government in Rome for relief from this responsibility. At the request from Rome, the Baltimore Province incorporated the foundations in Roseau. In 1999, the English-Speaking Region of the Caribbean was established, still part of the Baltimore Province but with their own local governing structure.

Through all these changes, Father Lamote became a Caribbean man, not a foreign missionary to the people, but a pastor among them. "He was a very gregarious priest and he loved to be with people," said Father Joseph Krastel.

"He loved to visit them in their homes and talk with them in the streets. He loved the people and the people loved him." Father Krastel noted that his confrere "wrote copiously and kept huge ledgers," compiling what could serve as a history of the Redemptorists and the people of Dominica over the past 60 years.

Father Krastel also recalled that Father Lamote served in Antigua in the late 1970s and enjoyed riding a motor bike to visit his parishioners.

According to Brother Gerard St. Hilaire, who was one of Father Lamote's altar servers at St. Patrick Church in Grand Bay, Dominica, the priest had a real gift for drawing the youth to church activities. "He loved swimming and going on picnics with the altar servers," he said. "He also liked working with his hands; he loved building things like pulpits." Brother Gerard noted that Father Lamote also was a favorite with the ladies who worked with the Legion of Mary.

ICM Sister Lovina Reyes, serving now in Jamaica, spent several years working in Dominica when Father Lamote was in Grand Bay. His prayer life, she wrote, "will always be an inspiration to me; his 'dry' humor and his expression of joy/excitement — 'uyuyuyuyuy' will always make me smile."

Among the countless babies Father Lamote baptized over the years is Father Glanville Joseph. "I love Father Lamote; he was like a father to me," Father Joseph said. "He was the people's priest and the people loved him wherever he went." When the Caribbean Region was established, the Redemptorists serving there were given a choice of returning to their home Province or becoming part of the new region under the Baltimore Province. Father Lamote asked Father Joseph: "If I stay in Dominica, will you take care of me when I'm old?" (Father Lamote was a vigorous 86 at the time.) The younger confrere assured the senior priest that he would.

According to Father Joseph, Father Lamote later had to undergo surgery and he was plagued with migraine headaches, yet he was still bringing Communion to the sick at age 95. During his recent hospitalization, Father Joseph said he could see "the agony on his face, but he never complained ... the nurses loved him. He was so humble in everything he did."

Father Joseph summed up Father Lamote's missionary zeal by saying, "He came to the people of the Caribbean and he loved us with an unconditional love."