

Received the Breath of Life
Tulsa, Oklahoma abt 1926

Called to Accept the Marist Brotherhood
26 July 1944

Was Commended to God
19 May 2001
Calvary Hospital, Bronx NY

Mass of Christian Burial
22 May 2001
Mount St Michael
Bronx, New York

Interment
Marist Brothers Cemetery
Esopus, New York

Brother Adolph L. Labonté, F.M.S., a Marist missionary for 27 years, died May 19, 2001 at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. He was 75.

Brother Labonté served in Sarawak, China, and Papua New Guinea, from 1961 to 1986. In 1988 he joined the Marists in Liberia, but returned to the United States in 1990 because of poor health.

Since that time, he was assigned to the Marist Brothers' Retreat House in Esopus where he did cooking for the retreats and property maintenance.

He was stationed at Mount St. Michael Academy in the Bronx from 1954 to 1961 and 1986 to 1988.

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he moved with his family to Manchester, New Hampshire. He entered the Marist Brothers in 1940 in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts, and completed the novitiate in Poughkeepsie, making first vows five years later and final vows in 1950. He graduated from Marist College in 1948.

A funeral Mass was offered May 22 at Mount St. Michael Academy. Burial was in the Marist Brothers' cemetery in Esopus.

-----This article appeared in the Catholic New York 24 May 2001

(Adapted portions of the eulogy given by Brother Thomas Simmons)

Brother Adolphe Leo ('44) earned his degree from Marian College in 1948. He cooked for a year before going to teach in Lowell. Then he taught in Lawrence for four years before moving to the Mount to be a prefect for boarding students. Adolphe loved small children the most. He kept a close eye out for the young ones who rarely received family visits. He would take them to the movies or to the Bronx Zoo.

Twelve years after his novitiate the Lord and Champagnat called Adolphe to the foreign missions. For 30 years he labored happily as a missionary. Adolphe answered "Yes" to anything asked of him, even before the entire question had been completed. "I trusted my superiors about anything they thought I could handle, and I went to work. I would do it again." Adolphe worked in classrooms that were no more than mud-floor huts. He slogged through many monsoon seasons. Malaria laid his body low, but not his spirit and dedication. They say he was forever smiling, and his students were noted as always being happy. Adolphe worked in exotic places, like Ipoh, Malaysia; Sibul, Sarawak; Papua, New Guinea; Borneo; and back to Sibul, Sarawak, where he was the school's principal and the director of his community. He was also with the American missionaries in Liberia several times.

Upon his return to the States Adolphe took up residence in Esopus. He was the man for all seasons during his twelve-year stint of duty there. His love for work for the good of his congregation knew no limits. Work was always for the good of tomorrow and for those who would follow. Adolphe gave work dignity. Whatever needed to be done, whatever it takes to get the job done, let's do it right now was his attitude.

To say "applesauce pancakes" would bring to some folks instant smiles and a recognition of Adolphe. Adolphe created this recipe. "Let's put some meat on these kids," he would say. "Let's give the retreatants and their staff a hearty breakfast. Applesauce is cheap enough." That's Adolphe's thinking about the well-being of his kids – even high school and college kids. Should a former retreatant return, he would want to know if Adolphe still made those pancakes?

When it came time to look at his mortality, Adolphe would simply say, "Just put me there in Esopus West. I want to be with my friends." Adolphe's battle with cancer started about 18 months ago. Through his numerous trips to Albany and his many surgeries, Adolphe kept his cool while instantaneously agreeing with whatever his doctors thought best for him. His only lament was the loss of time away from his lawn-mowing tractor or from his chance to work in the kitchen and be near his "kids." When he was told that his cancer had the upper hand, his immediate response was, "I have lived my life as a Marist Brother as best I could. I have absolutely no regrets and I am ready for Esopus West as God bids. My number has been called, as I have always known it would be. And so be it."

When Adolphe was told that Brother Provincial thought it best for him to move to the Mount and then to Calvary Hospital, he once again answered "Yes" before the provincial's thought was fully expressed. Not once did Adolphe complain about his condition or about the care he received along his journey. Adolphe was in the hospital at Calvary for fifteen days before continuing his journey beyond time on May 19th, a Saturday, Mary's day.

FROM BERNIE (Bernard Aloysius) GARRETT ('44): I read with sadness of the death of Brother Adolph Leo in the last issue. We were in the same group of '44; there are not many of that group still alive. Had I known of Adolph's death earlier I would have attended the Mass and the interment. Keep up the good work and keep the publication coming.