

## Guy Freu



**1931 - 2016**

**G**uy was born on the 18th April 1931 at Puichéric, Aude in the Diocese of Carcassonne. We know little about his family and his childhood except that his father, Marius and his mother, Rose Soulié were modest farmers and that he had two brothers and one younger sister. He did his primary schooling in Cailhavel followed by secondary school at the Junior Seminary of St. François Xavier in Castelnaudary. After leaving school; he applied to enter the White Fathers. Although he had fragile health, something which was a source of anxiety for him, and limited aptitude for studies, he had been marked by the scout movement and showed it by his loyalty, generosity and always ready to give of himself.

He did a year of Philosophy in Kerlois before doing his military service in Barcelonnette. He returned to Kerlois to finish his philosophical studies. He went to the novitiate in Maison Carrée near Algiers in September 1954 and it was here he achieved a certain equilibrium, which along with his discretion and candour gave him a certain influence over his confreres. He finished his novitiate in Eastview, Canada before beginning his theological studies there in August 1955. It was remarked, “One could always rely on him. In community, he will be a source of comfort and support for all. He took his Missionary Oath on the 21st June 1958 in Eastview and he was ordained priest there on the 31st January 1959.

Guy’s first appointment was to the Apostolic Prefecture of Kayes in the then French Sudan. However, in order to prepare himself for this future mission, he did a stage at “La Manouba” in Tunisia.

He arrived in the newly independent state of Mali in September 1960. He studied Bambara at the language centre in Faladyè after which he was appointed to the new mission of Nioro du Sahel where he arrived in May 1961. Unhappily, he did not find what he hoped for from the point of view of pastoral activities. Because he has done his scholasticate in Canada, he had hoped for an appointment to an English-speaking country. He was appointed to Kakoulou, near Kayes but the thought of learning a new language discouraged him. He taught in the school and spent a lot of time animating children’s groups such as Coeurs Vaillants and Âmes Vaillants.

Guy did not enjoy robust health and suffered from asthma. A year in France in 1966 did not bring a solution to the problem. His doctor allowed him to return to Mali on condition that there was a doctor nearby and that he was not too far from a hospital. Thus, he was appointed to Kayes in August 1967 and he accepted a teaching job in the Catholic schools. He became the Director/Chaplain of a Primary/Elementary School in Kayes. During his home leave in 1972, he saw the specialist who was treating his asthma and with a hint of a sense of humour, he wrote to one of his friends, "I have frequent problems breathing when I am lying down and the confreres in Kayes tell me that the only solution is to stay standing up!" When he returned to Kayes, he became curate at the Cathedral Parish. During his home leave of 1975, the Lord called his father unexpectedly and Guy's presence was a great comfort to his mother at that time.

In October 1976, Guy took up the post of Diocesan Treasurer, which he held until 1985. However, in 1980, he became the discreet "socius" and friend of Bishop Joseph Dao (+2011). He moved to the Bishop's house. Bishop Dao appreciated Guy very much because they got on well together. Bishop Dao appointed him Vicar General in 1985. While in charge of the diocesan finances, the confreres often showed their appreciation for his work. "He worked well as Treasurer. All the money I received from Belgium and Germany for the wells passed through him. I never had any problems in getting cash which I needed for the operating expenses." Another said, "I got on very well with him even if he was shy, reserved, discreet and not very communicative. During his time as Diocesan Treasurer he helped many people in difficulty but with a lot of discretion." Another remarked, "He always received me very well, constantly ready to look for a solution to the financial problems one presented him with. It was an occasion for him to share with me the various problems he met in the service of the Treasurer. It could last a long time especially when he began to light up his pipe! He trusted spontaneously anyone who came to ask for some service and could never understand why some people betrayed this trust."

Guy was certainly conscientious and precise, but the supervision of the building sites, which demanded good management was not his "charism." In particular, over a number of years, the financial situation of the diocese got worse and the number of people seeking help increased. The tension increased and Guy, in line with his character, began to isolate himself from the community instead of relying on it. In order to put an end to this situation and according to his wishes, he was appointed to France where he was received with open arms because the Province needed bursars for all the big houses. After some months as bursar in Tassy, he was appointed to rue Friant as bursar in 1987 while at the same time confessor to the Dominican Sisters of Montrouge.

Guy joyfully accepted the invitation to return to Bamako in 1988 as part of a delegation going to celebrate the centenary of the Church in Mali where he had worked for 26 years. He returned there in 1989 taking up the post of Regional Treasurer and in charge of welcoming confreres and visitors. However, his health remained fragile and he returned definitively to France in 1993.

After a family holiday, Guy went to Jerusalem to do the Session/Retreat at St. Anne. It was a providential experience at a critical time of his life. He contacted the Bishop of Pontoise and as a result, he was appointed to Mours where he was able to exercise a pastoral ministry in the parish of Presles, part of a group of parishes of Beaumont- sur- Oise. The contract was for three years but it was renewed successively every three years until 2003. In 2005, the Bishop of Pontoise appointed him to a group of parishes covering Beaumont- sur -Oise, Mours, Nointel and Presles under the responsibility of Fr. Philippe Volant who is still the Parish Priest.

We know little about the last years of Guy. He died in Pontoise Hospital on the 28th June 2016. A last word from Fr. Yves Masquelier spoken at his funeral, “Guy was an introvert, discreet, even self effacing, but his great affectivity, coming perhaps from his southern background, expressed itself by the warm relationships with the parishioners who keep a very good memory of him. Last week, when he asked me to help him sit in his armchair, he told me, ‘you see, this armchair was given to me by the parishioners of Presles.’ We remember him leading the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday in our Chapel where his intimate communion with those suffering in the world was apparent. He shared this suffering from the time he was struck down with cancer. However, he never complained and it did not prevent him from celebrating the Eucharist daily for the sisters, teachers and students of the Jeanne d’Arc school.”

Pierre Landreau