

## **President's Message**

### **November 2, 2014**

Last week it was with sadness that we were informed of Father Guy Lavallee's peaceful passing on October 25<sup>th</sup>. Father Guy was a good friend. He was also a religious leader, active mentor, spiritual guide and an organizer of the Metis Nation both here in Manitoba and across our Homeland. His love, passion and energy for the Metis people will be sorely missed.

While the last major event at which Father Guy gave opening prayers was at Louis Riel's gravesite when we brought home the Supreme Court decision on our MMF Land Claim, he often offered prayers at our annual November 16<sup>th</sup> Louis Riel commemoration. Each year at the St. Boniface Cathedral cemetery we celebrate the life and achievements of Louis Riel with both a Mass and a graveside ceremony. Unhappily, there will be an empty place in our hearts and our minds with Father Guy's absence at this ceremony and elsewhere in our lives.

For many years, Father Guy had pursued his passions, which included working towards Louis Riel's sainthood. My staff had met with him recently to discuss our participation in a university conference that was intended to include presentations about the spiritual acts and writings of Louis Riel to shed some light to a side of Riel of which most Canadians are unaware. He believed, as did others, that Riel was a saint of the type and nature of Ste. Joan of Arc: a leader, advocate, protector and martyr standing up for his people against forces of oppression.

Back in a 2009 Toronto Star article he was quoted as suggesting: "Maybe the time has come for us to study and look seriously at the possibility of having Louis Riel's name submitted to the Vatican ... for consideration for sainthood, [...] Like many other saints, he died a martyr's death, and like many other saints, the impact of his legacy continues to increase with each upcoming generation." To this day, many Metis invoke Riel's name in our prayers.

This past week many of us accompanied our children and grandchildren on Halloween night from door-to-door and trick-or-treating in search of goodies. Halloween means "All Hollows' Eve" or "All Saints' Eve" and takes place the night before the November 1<sup>st</sup> All Saints Day. This day is in honour of the saints, while the following day, called All Souls' Day, is a further time to remember and pray for our departed friends and family. In many Latin American countries this is a three-day festival.

Remembering our Ancestors, friends and family members, is not only an act of love, it is also an honourable and sacred task. It is because of their protection and sacrifice why we are here today. The autumn season, and particularly the month of November, is a good time to remember. In addition to All Saints Day and Louis Riel Day, there are the November 8<sup>th</sup> Aboriginal Veterans Day recognizing our Peoples' contributions in war and peacekeeping as well as November 11<sup>th</sup> Remembrance Day to remember the members of our armed forces who have died in the line of duty.

This past week I was in Guatemala for the World Indigenous Business Forum giving a presentation on the lessons the MMF has learned in the successful building of our Metis businesses and development institutions. This was an unequalled opportunity to share best practices in economic development and also to promote inter-indigenous trade. In visiting the city of Guatemala, and its surrounding countryside, what impressed me were the hardworking drive, friendliness, family commitment and hope that I saw in all those I met.

Guatemala is still recovering from a 30-year civil war that ended with a 1996 peace accord. As a result, many of the Guatemalan conference delegates consistently spoke of peace. Reflecting the importance of trade and relationships and the importance of stability, one of their presenters quoted Pope Paul VI: "development is the new word for peace." Considering the oppression and poverty Indigenous Peoples around the world have experienced, this quote seemed appropriate at a development conference just days before days of remembrance.

Before I leave you, I want to give a reminder that this year's MMF Annual General Assembly takes place next week on November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> in Winnipeg. The AGA is an important part of our governance structure. It is a great opportunity to meet, discuss, and make plans for the future. As part of the AGA there is a Youth Conference and I suggest that our youth check out our website for registration. I hope to see you at the AGA.

Upon closing, I offer my prayers for our friends, family, and veterans who have passed on and my condolences to those who have lost a loved one. I give special prayers for Father Guy and my thoughts for his family and friends. My hopes are with those who are sick or shut in. I also offer my best wishes to all.

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