

I can see God's hand guiding everything

*Looking back I am amazed at the working of God's Providence in my life,
from the way He called me to the Priesthood to where I am today.*

Fr. Paul Greuter

I grew up in Holland, the 11th of 16 children. There were more Priests in Holland than they had room for. I learned from the Canadian soldiers stationed in Holland that in many places in Western Canada the people had Mass only once a month and I felt a need to go there. It was not an easy decision for me since none of my family had left Holland.

I received my training in philosophy and theology in Edmonton Seminary in Alberta and was ordained in 1954 in the Diocese of Calgary. My first placement after ordination was to a parish in Drumheller where I was an assistant for five years. I was then assigned to the Twin Butte and Waterton lakes area for another five years, then to Cardston (where 85% of the population were Mormons) for another four years. In Cardston we also had to build a Rectory with voluntary labour. Next I went to Vulean for a short period of ten months (apparently I was not modern enough) and I was assigned the position as hospital chaplain in Calgary for another four years (where I apparently could do less damage). Each appointment was a difficult one for me but in the long run it has turned out much better than was expected. Even despite the fact that 1973 was a particularly stressful year since I became more or less an outcast among my fellow Priests, some of whom made a point of warning the parishioners about me.

It was around the mid 1960's when the changes came about in the Church. A table replaced the altar and the "simplifying the Mass"

entailed the reducing of the signs of reverence. My Catholic sense disagreed with these changes and with the exception of some vernacular I continued to offer the Mass as it always was before. Of course, as a result this made me quite unpopular not only with some of the lay folk but especially with the Bishop and Priests. It all came to a head in 1973 while I was chaplain in the hospital in Calgary. Every day at least one person would approach me and say "oh, you are that nut that Father so and so was talking about". It caused me to question myself as to whether I was doing any good at all in my Priestly ministry working under such stressful circumstances. I felt a nervous breakdown coming on and my doctor told me to take a month's leave immediately.

After this time I did not feel much better and, after seeing the effects of a nervous breakdown in another Priest, I made the decision to retire from active Priesthood. It was a difficult decision. I needed to go away, find a job to make a living and I also needed someone else to be present to continue my daily Mass. Just about that time a lady I had known in Cardston, Mary English, was now working in Calgary and about to retire since she was 65 years old. I approached Mary to ask her if she would be interested in being my housekeeper. After Mary spoke to her daughters she then consented to take the position as housekeeper. We decided to move to Vernon, B.C. since Mary had a friend living there and it was better for her that she moves to a place where she would at least know someone since I would be working all day.

We moved to Vernon in November 1973 and Mary was present each day when I offered up the Mass and she looked after me like a mother. We rented a home and made a little Chapel. In September 1977 two ladies from Salmon Arm, Mrs. Bustin and Mrs. MacPherson learned from Father Normandin that a traditional Priest was living in Vernon, B.C. The ladies persisted until finally they got in touch with me and asked if they could come for Mass. I had not expected any of this and yet how could I refuse them? The next Sunday they arrived at our home, a total of eight of them, whereas we had only enough room for four in our Chapel, the rest had to occupy the hallway. The following Sunday I had arranged to offer the Mass in the dining room with about twelve people sitting in the adjacent living room. It was then decided to transform the rumpus room in the basement of the house into a Chapel (in my spare time of course) and there we continued to offer up the Mass until May 1986. If I happened to be working at my job on the day shift, we held Mass in the afternoon, and when on afternoon shift we offered it in the morning.

In 1982 the Delview Hospital, where I was employed, closed its doors for good putting me out of work, but by that time the congregation had grown to such an extent that I was able to devote my full time for the people.

In 1985 the Ukrainian Catholics moved to a new Church and the old one was put up for sale. I approached the Priest to let him know that I was interested in purchasing it. Everything was working out fine until the Bishop got wind of it and put a stop to any transaction. It seems the sales contract was changed to state that the property could not be used as a Church. With that I lost interest in it. Mary English saw an ad in the newspaper advertising a hall for sale and contacted the real estate indicating an interest. The realtor arrived at the house and when he learned why we were interested in the hall he then told us that the hall would not suit our purpose. Then the realtor mentioned the Ukrainian Church being up for sale. We explained to him the negative experience we had in our attempt to purchase this property and the unreasonableness of the changes in the sales contract. The realtor replied that he knew quite a few of the Ukrainian Catholics and would speak to them about the situation. The people seemed very pleased that

their old Church was of interest to Catholics, that it would remain standing and would be used as a Catholic Church. Also they were quite angry when they learned what had happened regarding our desire to buy this property.

In March 1986 I preached a mission in Winnipeg and on the last day Mary English contacted me to tell me that the Ukrainian Priest had stopped by to ask if my offer still stood to purchase their old Church. It was the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19th. When I arrived back home the next day I met with the Ukrainian Priest, saw the real estate agent and the deal to purchase was in the works. Many changes had to be made in the Church and with the help of the two sons-in-law of Mary we managed to get the work done. On May 1st, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, we took official possession of the Church, hall and house and offered the first Mass in the Church on May 18th, 1986. Mr. W. Bonsel had carved a beautiful crucifix for the main Altar and his wife donated a beautiful altar cloth which she had embroidered herself. When Father Normandin ceased travel-



ling the country I was asked to go to other places such as Kamloops, Osoyoos, Nelson, Williams Lake etc. although I had served some of these places before.

Around 1988 the asbestos tiles that covered the side of the Church became loose and some had blown off because of the winds. Realizing this potential danger of someone being injured we got together to talk about what needed to be done. The windows of the Church were certainly far from being airtight. We agreed that all the windows needed to be replaced and new siding for the entire perimeter of the Church building, including the dome. We had to re-finance the mortgage and as a result our mortgage almost doubled. When the work was completed it looked like a brand new Church and everyone, including the Ukrainian Catholics, was very pleased with the end results. I put it all in the hands of St. Joseph. We got the good news that we could purchase the Church on his Feast Day and got official possession also on his Feast Day. So I asked him to look after the mortgage too and he did! I had received cheques from everywhere, not only from Canada but also the USA, the Yukon, from people I did not know and even to this day I still wonder how they knew about our Church. The parishioners were also so kind and generous... and so much so that in April 1993 our 10 year mortgage was paid off. When Bishop Fellay came for Confirmations I was able to give him the transfer of the property to the Society of St. Pius X. We had made the decision to do this since we realized that anything could happen to me (being 69 yrs. old) and the Society of St. Pius X was to us the only stable traditional Society to give the title to. We made arrangements with Bishop Fellay that I would remain in Vernon as long as I was able to do the required work and remain free to make any changes as necessary. We had an unexpected expense when the floor in the hall caved in (because of rotted timbers) and a cement floor was installed.

In the meantime I made a floor plan for a two-storey priory for the lot of the old house. I located a good architect who offered us the blueprints of a priory which exceeded our expectations and through the architect obtained a good contractor. The contractor began to dismantle the house in the beginning of April 1997 and we experienced a two weeks delay because the type of clay on

which we had to build was a problem. We then had to change the foundation and pour a cement basement floor twelve inches above ground level. Despite these setbacks I was still able to move into the new Priory by the end of July 1997. We left the basement unfinished but provisions were made at the time of building to install the rough plumbing for a future washroom. Whenever the Society would take over the Priory they could divide the basement as they so desired.

On August 14, 2000 the first stained glass window of Our Lady of Guadalupe consisting of more than 1200 pieces of glass, was installed in the Church. It was made by Michele Jackson with the help of her family and some parishioners. This same year became a very strained time for me and so I decided that for the good of the parish I should leave. I was in Vernon for 27 yrs. and it became obvious that the time had come for someone else to take over the parish at the end of September. I moved to an apartment in Abbotsford to retire. The Society did not have a priest to take over the Langley and Nanaimo Chapels. Even though it was not in my plan, I looked after the Sunday Mass in both places until August 2001. By then I felt it had become too much for me.

Some parishioners in Nanaimo talked me into moving to Nanaimo since they had only the Sunday Mass and no First Fridays or Saturdays or Holy Days of Obligation. It was the best move I could have made as they looked after me in all respects. When the people found out I could not cook, they even supplied me with fresh and frozen meals and a driver for long journeys. God's Providence has been with me all the way.

In everyone's life there are ups and downs and looking back I can see God's hand guiding everything. I did not want to go to Cardston but had I not, I would not have met Mary English who pulled me through a very difficult time and was not only my housekeeper but also my inspiration and support for 21 years. If the situation in Vernon had not happened I would never have ended up in Nanaimo where I hope to finish out the rest of my life as a Priest. God is so good even in sending us sacrifices. It is all for our greater good. I feel confident that as He has looked after me my whole life He will also look after me in my last days.