

A Tribute to Father Denis Hébert 1930-2015

By: Eugene Malo

It is with sadness that the Roots of Change Foundation Board shares the news that our dearly beloved relative, friend to all, and missionary priest, Fr. Denis Hébert, has completed his earthly journey, on April 14, 2015.

In 1958, he began his vocation as an archdiocesan priest at St. Patrick's Parish in Camrose. His last parish in the Archdiocese of Edmonton was St. Anne of the Prairies in Trochu. From there, Father began serving the poor in Peru in 1969. In 1990, he settled in a community that he came to love the most: Edgar Lang, the poorest area of Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. In this community he accepted everyone as brothers and sisters, was gentle to both old and young and compassionate to all, especially to those who were deeply wounded in both spirit and body. Like them, he lived a life of simplicity and poverty. As a trusted friend and advisor, Father Denis brought light into the many dark recesses of his adopted community.

He looked forward to his yearly visits with relatives and friends in Vancouver and Edmonton areas. That gave him an opportunity to spend some time with his bishop. He also looked forward to reassuring his supporters of the progress being made in Nicaragua, reminding them that much was left to be done, and in his charming and engaging manner, suggesting that a million-dollar budget would expedite the needed projects. It was during such a conversation at the home of Rick and Rita Leblanc ten years ago, that the Roots of Change Foundation was created. Although the Foundation's budget is only about a quarter of what Father dreamed about, he was optimistic that his grand goal would eventually be attained through the success of the Foundation's Planned Giving Program.

Father's organizational abilities and wise understanding of human nature also resulted in the founding of FUNDACCO (a charity registered in Nicaragua) in 2007. FUNDACCO and the Roots of Change Foundation have since formed a mature working partnership. FUNDACCO's continuing success in identifying and overseeing projects can be attributed to the implementation of Father's often repeated axiom: "Listen, think and then do."

Fr. Denis' health had been declining during the past several years. A lack of energy, and mobility issues severely restricted his involvement in FUNDACCO's daily activities. During this time, in imitation of Father's lived faith and vision, FUNDACCO has demonstrated its competence in providing leadership in a responsible and dependable manner. The communities served by FUNDACCO have transferred the trust and hope they had in Father into its experienced and capable leadership.

As he approached the end of his life, Fr. Denis was thankful for what the Lord was able to accomplish through his efforts, and confident that others would continue to faithfully serve those he loved the most, the poor. Through the words and generosity of this humble man of God, Hope was present in their midst. Fr. Denis was confident his supporters would continue to keep this hope alive through their donations to the Fr. Denis Hébert Endowment Fund and/or Roots of Change Foundation General Fund. Please make all cheques payable to the Roots of Change Foundation and indicate the Fund to which your donation should be directed.

Fr. Denis will be dearly missed by all who have been graced by his presence and who have been associated with and touched by his life's work. He is survived by his sister, Sister Yvette Hébert s.a.s.v.

"Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21)