

Sister Irene Christine Lavallée. (b. 1924)

Sister Irene Lavallée was born in St. Laurent, Manitoba on December 6, 1924, the ninth of fourteen children, nine girls and five boys, born to Madeleine Beauchamp and Pierre Lavallée. She was brought up in St. Laurent and was taught by the Sisters of the Franciscan Missionary's of Mary who were then in charge of the St. Laurent School. During her high school days she felt the call to become a missionary Sister. In 1941, she left St. Laurent for a year of studies with the Sisters of the Franciscan Missionary's of Mary at Rigaud, Quebec. In September of 1942, she entered their novitiate at Quebec City for two and one-half years training.

Her first assignment was to the Philippines; however, due to visa delays she was given an interim assignment at a Convalescent Home for Cardiac children in Long Island, New York. In January of 1947, she and three other Sisters began their long journey to the Philippines. They traveled by train to San Francisco, then by boat to Shanghai, Hong Kong and Manila, Philippines. At Manila she worked as Assistant to the Superior at a 1,000-student school with an affiliated orphanage with 150 children (until 1951). She pronounced her final vows on March 19, 1948. From August of 1951 until February of 1957 Sister Irene was at Sariaya, Queson, serving in a school with 600 students and providing Catechetical Instruction in the surrounding rural areas. She was Sister Superior for the community's 15 Sisters. In this capacity she taught Religion in the high school as well as taking responsibility for the community's financial management and administration.

During 1957 to 1963, Sister Irene was assigned to the Leper Colony at Tala, Rizal. She was Superior at this location as well. The colony had over 1,000 lepers. Their Order was responsible for all the children from birth to five years of age. Her next assignment was as Superior at the school and boarding school at Cebu City. This school had about 200 students and also operated a community soup kitchen. In late 1966 early 1967, she made her first return home to Canada in twenty years.

In 1967, she returned to work at Quezon City in the Philippines, then at Singapore in 1968 and Australia in 1969. She was Directress and Administrator at a retreat centre, Cursillo Days of Studies, in Brisbane, Australia. In 1972, she took a one-year sabbatical leave to Canada and used this time to complete her Grade XII and obtain a Diploma as a Medical Secretary from the Herzing Institute.

In 1974, Sister Irene returned to Brisbane to work at the Xavior Hospital for Handicapped Children as a supervisor. She then opened a new convent at Deception Bay, Queensland. In July of 1977, she returned to Canada. At Prince George, British Columbia she worked at a half-way house for alcoholics, and then taught Theological courses at St. Paul's University in Ottawa, and did pastoral work in Toronto and St. Boniface, Manitoba. In 1987, she was assigned as assistant to the Superior at Ste. Anne de Beaupre, Quebec, then

moved to Ottawa where she supervised a day care centre and handled the Community's finances.

In 1991, she was assigned to the Mother house in Rome, Italy and celebrated her Golden Jubilee as a sister in 1993. She was privileged to attend the Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II, received communion from him and shake his hands. In May of 1993, she returned to St. Laurent, Manitoba after 52 years of absence. There she performed pastoral work in the parish and taught Religion at the St. Laurent School. In February of 1999, the Convent was closed and sold to the Community Development Corporation who transformed it into the St. Laurent Living Centre and St. Laurent Community Health Centre. She then returned to Ottawa and then to Ste. Anne de Beaupre, Quebec. (Contributed by Father Guy Lavallée.)

Compiled by Father Guy Lavallée and Lawrence Barkwell Louis Riel Institute

