

# Saint François de Laval



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Centre d'animation François-De Laval Newsletter



## Many are called, but few are chosen

By Martina de Vries

*The project Keeping the memory of St. François de Laval alive involves creating an exhaustive inventory of all the documents that mention or refer to François de Laval. As part of this project we have transcribed several long administrative letters in which Msgr. de Laval showed himself to be a discerning human resources manager, and excerpts from these letters are presented here.*

A PAGE OF HISTORY



When François de Laval was appointed as bishop and given the task of establishing the Catholic Church in Canada, he already knew that he would be going to a new country where he would have to build everything up from scratch. He arrived with the firm intention of establishing a Church that would endure, and he applied the same strategy to everything he did, from selecting candidates to choosing materials for building parish churches. Quality took precedence over quantity, and sustainability over short-term savings.

### The need for a seminary

During his first pastoral visit in the winter of 1660, François de Laval noted the harsh climate, the large distance between villages, the isolation, and the lack of workers. In this view, the first step in ensuring a solid foundation for the Church in Canada was to create a lever that would maximize his efforts and resources—the Quebec Seminary. "It is necessary in New France more than in any other place to have [a Seminary] because (1) It is not possible to find ecclesiastics in France willing to go there and leave their establishment unless they can be assured of spending their life in a place where they will be taken care of; (2) The duties of priests are so continual and so time-consuming that

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Detail of Monument Laval

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



# Many are called, but few are chosen

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often, for a considerable time, they are barely able to say their Office, and unless they can revive themselves in a seminary, they grow weary and return to France, which happened to several ecclesiastics."<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Seminary could train clergy members locally, reducing the need to rely on France: "A Seminary to serve the clergy of this new Church [...] in which young clerics will be educated and trained to make them suitable for God's service [...] a continual school for virtue and a place from which we can draw pious and capable members."<sup>2</sup>

## The need for reliable priests

The second step was to select priests who could travel to Canada. In the earlier part of his career, as Archdeacon of Évreux, François de Laval had gained experience in assessing the merits of various candidates and during his trips to France, he studied each prospect carefully. He then described them in long letters to the directors of his Seminary, listing their qualities and weaknesses along with the positions for which they seemed most suited. Unfortunately, "A number of mediocre applicants have presented themselves, but it is rare to see any that have what are known as the right qualities, either in terms of grace or natural talent, to perform the duties needed at the Quebec Seminary, and suitable for our union and for sharing in the direction and governance of the Seminary. All those who have worldly property or are clearly endowed with qualities of grace or nature take the view of the Eastern missions."<sup>3</sup>



## Key qualities

### 1: Health

It is easy to suppose that the first quality sought by Msgr. de Laval in his candidates was zeal or virtue, and this would probably have been the case had he been a bishop in France. But the priests were needed in Canada, and the first criterion for selection, even before a candidate's character could be considered, was good health. They had to be able to withstand hardship: "[...] it would not be charitable to expose his health, which is not strong, in such a remote and forsaken place."<sup>4</sup> Winter was glacial and "woodstoves can ruin the best and strongest constitution. People who are not accustomed to them quickly develop a chest complaint, which gradually becomes so intense that there is no remedy."<sup>5</sup> Abbé Dudouyt, François de Laval's procurator in Paris, recommended "Mr. Lefebvre, a priest in the town of Pontoise, 27 years of age, [who] is ready to travel with Mr. Dombourg for our Seminary. He is a good subject who will be able to preach in Quebec and work in all the other missions. He is in good health, active and conscientious, and appears to have a strong vocation."<sup>6</sup>

### 2: Intelligence

The second criterion appears to have been intelligence, or at least resourcefulness. In a country that lacked everything, priests had to be versatile. "Mr. Geoffroy [...] is a good prospect and is well endowed with grace, courage

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and willingness; we will be able to do anything with him, and he will always be happy and content. He lacks neither judgment nor wit. He has been at the Seminary for about three months, and his conduct was edifying, being always ready to do what he was asked, putting his own wishes aside. He is completely suitable for the Seminary and has the true mettle we need in Canada.”<sup>3</sup>

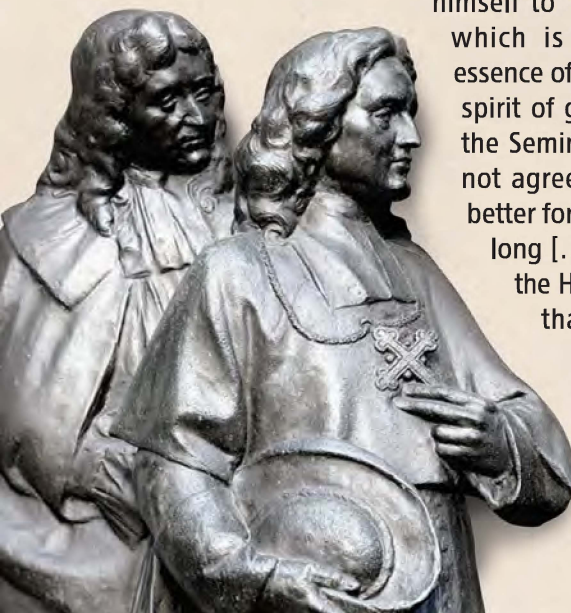
The same approach was used for workers and “givers” [lay brothers] at the Seminary, and Msgr. de Laval sought references from other authorities. “He looks like a fine fellow, and appears to me to be more sober and discreet and to have a strong feeling for piety. [...] He has very good manners, is robust and does not appear lacking in spirit or conduct. [...] He openly stated that there is no heavy work he will not undertake willingly, and he appears to me to be entirely capable of performing all the tasks that we continually have to deal with on all sides. My only conclusion about this boy is that he will be useful for all kinds of things.”<sup>3</sup> “His great desire to serve the Seminary and the strong morals attested to by the Frères de la Charité give me a strong inclination towards him, and there is some hope that his conduct will become more constant and firm. He shows great promise [...]”<sup>3</sup>

Other candidates, however, were quickly rejected: “Mr. Valet [...] would not be suitable for administering a parish, his underlying nature being rustic, coarse and distasteful; which is not suitable for ecclesiastical functions, where one is constantly required to converse and interact with other people, whether children or adults”; and “Charprenet, who clearly has too little wit or judgment to be of the slightest use to the Seminary.”<sup>3</sup>

### 3: Seminary values

Last, the candidates had to agree with the Seminary’s values, which included renunciation of their property. “It

appears doubtful that he will be able to dispose himself to “disappropriation,” which is nevertheless the essence of and constitutes the spirit of grace that supports the Seminary, and if he cannot agree to it, it would be better for him not to stay too long [...] We must pray to the Holy Family to ensure that people who are not imbued with



Detail of  
Monument Laval

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel

this spirit are not allowed to remain in a house which is so particularly devoted and consecrated to it.”<sup>3</sup>

## The right person in the right place

Once he had selected candidates, Msgr. de Laval ensured that their specific talents could be put to good use and that their weaknesses were compensated. “Mr. Mossu [...] has much grace and gentleness. He is believed to be suitable for administering the parish of Quebec: he gains the love of all who know him. There is no doubt that he is considered to have enough of an outgoing nature to speak in public, at least to preach, and is well suited to that task, because he is also able to do a great deal of good, being possessed of unction and an extremely attractive outside appearance.”<sup>3</sup>

To help Abbé Thury in his mission in Acadia, Msgr. de Laval believed “that Mr. Volant would be more suitable than Mr. de Saint-Claude [...] This does not mean that, if you consider that someone else is more suitable, you should not settle the matter in another way, for the greater good of the mission. [...] Mr. Buisson is a canon, and I believe him to be more useful either at Cap-de-Tourmente with the children, or at Quebec, [rather] than sending him further away. [...] For Mr. Pinguet, apart from the fact that he too is a canon, I find him still very young and not possessed of all the qualities needed to stand on his own, as Mr. Volant would be able to do.”<sup>3</sup>

## The ideal candidate

At last, the bishop had found his ideal ecclesiastical candidate: “He has grace and docility; he has a firm and generous spirit, even and regular, sound and capable judgment, in addition to being well liked at the Seminary and a good support for it; he is wise and prudent and capable, as far as I can tell, of keeping a secret, and someone one can trust. I noted all these qualities in him, and I believe that he will be extremely useful to the Seminary and, clearly, he is the best of all the candidates who have come forward in more than two years.”<sup>5</sup> The candidate concerned was Henri-Jean Tremblay, who was ordained by Msgr. de Laval and went on to become the Quebec Seminary’s procurator in Paris. ■

1 : Reasons for establishing a seminary in New France, by Laval (Quebec, after March 26, 1663)  
2 : Letters patent establishing the Quebec Seminary, by Laval (Paris, March 26, 1663)  
3 : Letter from Laval to the Quebec Seminary (Paris, May 1685)  
4 : Letter from Laval to the Quebec Seminary (Paris, March 18, 1687)  
5 : Letter from Laval to the Quebec Seminary (Paris, June 9, 1687)  
6 : Lettre from Dudouyt to Laval (Paris, April 28 to May 7, 1683)



Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



## Quebec under siege, as reported by Laval

TESTIMONY

**In a letter to his friend and former governor of New France, the Marquis de Denonville, Msgr. de Laval described the 1690 siege of Quebec. As far as we know, this excerpt from the letter hasn't been published since 1940 and remains little known.**

You are right to call this country a country of miracles: never has God shown his power over it more than He has this year.

Since your departure we have had an almost universal famine but, through God's mercy, no-one has died from starvation. At the same time, we saw an English naval force lay siege to Quebec with 32 sailing ships, although some say 34. They demanded that the city surrender along with the entire country, allowing only one hour's deliberation, after which they would put everyone to the sword and lay waste to everything else. They began by pounding the lower and upper town with cannon-fire, firing, as I have heard, at least 2,000 shots. We had recourse to God, his Holy Mother, the angels and all the patron saints of our poor Church, afflicted on all sides, and the most bitter disappointment of the enemy was to hear, during the siege, the bells ringing for divine service as usual, from which they inferred that we were not frightened of them, although most people were dismayed.

Practically all the pelts and furniture from the lower town were brought to the Seminary, along with many families

who had sought refuge there, including the family of the Intendant. In a case of such necessity the Seminary could not refuse to provide all possible charity, at the cost of a large part of its provisions. The soldiers and others who were present seized and used at least 100 cords of wood, and more than 15 or 16 planks that were broken up and burned; in short, in terms of cattle and other damage, the Seminary lost something like 1,000 écus. But in times like these one must be patient and do whatever good one can, however great one's own needs.

Major-General William Phips of Massachusetts laid siege to Quebec from October 18 to 24, 1690. The upper town was fortified behind high walls, while the lower town was defended by two riverside batteries. Over 1,500 cannonballs were fired. Some of the English force attempted to land at Beauport, but were pushed back by soldiers and armed civilians. The 6-day siege followed Phips' demand that Quebec surrender, to which Frontenac famously replied, "I have no reply to make to your general other than from the mouths of my cannons".

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The enemy disembarked with more than 2,000 men between Quebec and Beauport. They made several attempts to move towards Quebec in order to encircle it, two vessels having sailed upriver to halfway along Chemin de Saint-Michel to join up with those who were moving by land, preparing the way for an army that was to come from Orange and Manhattan, made up of English and Savages, both Delawares and Iroquois, numbering it is said 4,000 men, after the enemy arranged to join with it at the same time as they besieged Quebec. If the naval force had arrived 8 days earlier, and if God had permitted, it would inevitably have taken Quebec, where there were not even 150 men all told. You can clearly see that they would have had no difficulty, the city being unfortified, as you know.

We sent dispatch after dispatch to Montreal, where Governor Frontenac and the Intendant were, with all the troops. In the meantime, we did what we could to marshal a few settlers and at last, Governor Frontenac and the Intendant arrived with their soldiers. A few cannon batteries were positioned at various places and did quite a lot of damage to the enemy ships, which were forced to distance themselves but lost none of their resolution to continue the siege, meaning that Quebec was doubly besieged by enemies and by famine. If the inhabitants of Beaupré, Beauport and Île d'Orléans had not shown

their courage by attacking the enemy in their camp, there is every reason to believe they would have remained on shore longer and would have reduced everyone in Quebec to the direst extremity. As it was, they were forced to return to their ships at night

in the greatest confusion, leaving in their camp 5 cannons and one flag, which the inhabitants seized after firing shots at the enemy, who did not dare to approach in boats to recover them and then, through God's special protection, which put consternation in their minds, they withdrew, forced in part by the bad weather which was truly extraordinary for the season.

But where God showed us His special and wholly miraculous protection was in the case of three of our ships, which were arriving just as the enemy was sailing to meet them and which, had they not been warned at Baie Saint-Paul, would have fallen into their hands. They could not however totally escape the enemy's attention and were seen to enter the Saguenay river, having no other refuge, and just as the enemy sailed after them to enter the river behind them, the wind which had been in our ships' favour suddenly turned and, when fog and a swirl of snow arose, they were driven out of the Saguenay and despite trying as many as four times over the space of 5 days, were never able to enter. At last, a sort of tempest of snow occurred that forced them to give up and leave. Our three ships were the *Saint-François-Xavier*, the *Glorieux* and a frigate loaded with flour and lard, and in the two first was all the silver the King sends to this country, amounting to 200 or so thousand *livres* in coin. It is estimated that the loss of these three ships would have been scarcely less than 1,000,000 *livres*, which would have reduced the county to the direst misery and poverty. There were another seven ships following, of which we have had no news and some of which, unless they enjoyed the same protection from God as the first three ships, may have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The dispersion of the army from Manhattan, Orange and the whole of New Albany, composed of the Iroquois and English, was no less miraculous. They came as far as Lac du Saint-Sacrement [part of Lake Champlain], where they were spotted by our Savage scouts, but God sowed division among them [...] May God grant that the country makes better use of all these graces than it has done in the past. We have prayed continuously here for three months, which no doubt helped attract all these blessings. ■

Excerpt from a letter from Laval to Denonville, November 20, 1690

**The thick stone vaults of the Quebec Seminary provided a refuge for the city's population during the siege of 1690.**

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel





# Are you interested in consecrated life?

ACTUALITY

## Prayer network to support sacerdotal and religious vocations: Alliance François-de-Laval

The team that offers pastoral care for vocations in the diocese of Quebec has set up a prayer network to support sacerdotal and religious vocations, under the name *Alliance François-de-Laval*.

As faithful members of the Church, and following in the footsteps of our saint, the missionary bishop, we all have a role to play in the attraction, training, support, and sanctification of new clergy members.

If this subject interests you, you are invited to recite a daily prayer with a rosary specially produced for this purpose. The rosary comes with a prayer image, and is distributed only to people who have signed a good faith agreement.



Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel

The 15-bead rosary, in white and gold, represents the priesthood and the Virgin Mary, known as Marie-Reine-du-Clergé [Mary Queen of the Clergy]. One medallion is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, while another shows St. François de Laval on one side and the Holy Family on the other. A financial contribution is suggested to cover the cost of producing the rosary.

Individuals or Christian communities that wish to support or take more responsibility for vocations can contact the diocesan team at 418 692-3981 (255) or [vocations@ecdq.org](mailto:vocations@ecdq.org). ■

## The vocations team in the diocese of Quebec:

You cannot “possess” a vocation as you would an object; it is an invitation to progress and grow alongside a person, who is Christ. If you would like to talk about a possible call to live a consecrated life or the priesthood, you can consult the [www.ecdq.org](http://www.ecdq.org) website under the “Vocations” tab, or contact Abbé André Gagné at 418 692-3981, extension 255 or Ginette L’Heureux at 418 692-0645, extension 303. ■

## The Major Seminary of Quebec team

Following the lead of Msgr. François de Laval, who believed that the Church should not accept all candidates without discernment, the Quebec Seminary can only agree with the views of Pope Francis on the urgent need to renew the priesthood. In his own words, “How important it is for young priests to find parish priests and bishops who encourage them in this perspective, not only because they are waiting for them because they need a replacement or to fill vacancies! I would like to say two things on this, off the cuff. Vacancies: Do not fill these empty posts with people who were not called by the Lord; do not take men from anywhere. Carefully examine a young man’s vocation, its authenticity, and whether he is in search of refuge or because he hears the Lord’s call. To accept someone only because there is a need, dear bishops, is a lien on the Church! A lien.”<sup>1</sup>

The Quebec Major Seminary offers a program of discernment and preparation for the priesthood for all Francophone and bilingual dioceses. All candidates considering entry to the Major Seminary are invited to undertake a process that is both practical and specific.

At the end of this process, a decision is made as to whether the candidate has sufficient maturity and experience of community and Christian life, and is suitably disposed to be guided through a process of discernment and training.

Consult the website [www.gsdq.org](http://www.gsdq.org) or call 418 692-0645, extension 300 or, toll-free, 1 877 692-0645, or write to [secretariatgsq@gmail.com](mailto:secretariatgsq@gmail.com) ■

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, To participants in the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Clergy, June 1, 2017

# ALBUM

*A number of the events held to commemorate St. François de Laval are often unknown and deserve a mention. Feel free to share them with us.*

## 1 A source of inspiration

Msgr. Francis Y. Kalabat is the head of the Chaldean Catholic Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Michigan, a parish of Iraqis who fled religious persecution in their country to settle in the United States. He likes to present St. François de Laval as the first Catholic leader in North America and as a man who had to build a life in a new country after being uprooted—an experience they all share. To mark the historical and spiritual link between the Church and St. François, Msgr. Kalabat, during a talk on February 6 that was followed by a special ceremony, offered a first-class relic to his Archbishop, Msgr. Allen H. Vigneron, who also holds a deep admiration for Quebec's first bishop. The relic is now available for public veneration in the cathedral of Detroit.



Msgr. Francis Kalabat (right) offers a first-class relic of St. François de Laval to Msgr. Allen Vigneron. Photo : Lubna Seba

## 2 Mont François-De Laval

Mont François-De Laval was named on October 17, 1994 to mark the three-hundredth anniversary of the diocese of Quebec. The mountain rises to a height of 1,082 metres in the Jacques-Cartier national park, 60 km north of Quebec City, making it one of the highest peaks in the Laurentian mountain chain. It can be seen northwest of the 112 km marker on highway 175. <https://goo.gl/maps/6xkneyEL7upav1Wy6>



Photo : Google Maps

## 3 Out of luck!

The long-awaited dedication of the cathedral of Saint-Hyacinthe, scheduled for May 24, 2020, has been postponed to a later date in order to comply with the public health measures in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. "After 140 years, the cathedral can wait another few months," says Abbé Pierre Cordeau.

The original date was chosen in memory of the Blessed Louis-Zéphirin Moreau, the 4th bishop, who led the project to build the current cathedral. The dedication ceremony will include a number of rites, such as the placement of saintly relics in the altar by the bishop, and these will include a relic of the Blessed Moreau as well as a relic of St. François de Laval.

Photo : wikipedia.org





Photos : Fonds Daniel-Abel



ICONOGRAPHY

## Quebec under the French Regime

When the insurance company *L'Industrielle* built its head office, it decided to embellish the entrance hall with a work of art celebrating the saga of the French Regime. A panel of architects and staff members selected a sketch by Jean Dallaire, a teacher at the School of Fine Arts in Quebec City.

The artist chose to mark various key moments using grand classical figures. The mural is a chronology viewed from left to right, and features the figures of Champlain, Hébert, Frontenac turning his back on Phipps' ships, Montcalm sitting injured on horseback and facing away from Wolfe's ships and troops, and, last, the valiant Lévis, holding in one hand the fleur-de-lys flag and, in the other, the document surrendering New France.

The centre of the work is reserved for François de Laval blessing a young Aboriginal boy, an Ursuline nun teaching young girls, and an Augustinian hospitaller nun caring for the injured.

### Québec sous le Régime français

Jean Dallaire (1916-1965)

A commission for the insurance company *L'Industrielle*, today known as *Industrielle Alliance*, in the entrance hall to the head office at 1080, Grande-Allée Ouest in Quebec City.

Oil on backed canvas, 3 by 12 metres, 1951.

We thank Yannick Morin, from the communications department, for his assistance and research.



TESTIMONY

*I serve the Bishop of Petra [François de Laval] with the same affection as I would the Holy Apostles of Our Lord or their disciples: for I consider him to be of the same rank and [...] I believe that the merit of those who devote themselves to the Gospel in these times is at least equal to that of the first [apostles].*

Letter from William Lesley, procurator of the Quebec Seminary in Rome (Rome, July 20, 1664)