

The Catholic Church at St. Paul, Oregon

Etienne Lucier, a French Canadian and former member of the William Price Hunt Overland Expedition, came to Oregon in 1812. He later worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. He moved to the Willamette Valley (two and a half miles west of present day Champoeg) in 1829. He was soon followed by Joseph Gervais and Louis Labonte. This growing settlement of former Astor-Hunt and Hudson's Bay Company employees came to be known as French Prairie.

On July 3, 1834, the French Canadian Catholics living at French Prairie sent a letter to Bishop Joseph Norbert Provencher, vicar general and auxiliary bishop to the Bishop of Quebec, at Red River (now the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, Manitoba) at the suggestion and with the help of Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver (now Vancouver, Washington), asking for a priest to serve their needs. Receiving no reply, they sent a second letter on February 23, 1835.

On June 6, 1835, Bishop Provencher wrote Dr. John McLoughlin that he had no priests to spare but that he would soon travel to both Canada and Europe to see if he could obtain some priests for the Oregon Country. He also wrote a letter on June 8, 1835, to the "families of the Willamette Valley and beyond the Rockies" that he would send someone to "bring the word of God to them" and the Indian tribes. This became the first pastoral letter in the Oregon Country.

On February 28, 1836, at Bishop Provencher's request, the Holy See granted an indulgent annexing the Oregon Country to the Vicariate Apostolic of Red River. Bishop Provencher also wrote Bishop Joseph Signay of Quebec for priests.

Buoyed by the promise that a priest would soon be sent, the Catholic Canadians constructed a log church in 1836, the first Catholic church in Oregon, four miles from Champoeg. Dr. McLoughlin, finding it not properly located, had it dismantled, log by log, and moved to Saint Paul and rebuilt. It was thirty by seventy feet and had a small room in back of the altar for the priest's residence.

Upon reception of the news that the Hudson's Bay Company would provide passage to the Oregon Country for two priests, Bishop Signay of Quebec, on April 17, 1838, appointed Fr. Francis Norbert Blanchet vicar general of Quebec with jurisdiction over the Oregon Country. He also appointed Fr. Modeste Demers assistant to Fr. Blanchet.

Fr. Francis Blanchet joined the Hudson's Bay Company boat brigade on May 5, 1838, after it had departed from Lachine near Montreal two days before. He arrived at Red River on June 5 where he met Bishop Provencher and Dr. John McLoughlin (who was on his way to Montreal and London). Fr. Modeste Demers joined Fr. Blanchet at Red River and they departed for Fort Vancouver on July 10. They arrived at Fort Vancouver on November 24, 1838, delayed several days by a boat mishap at the *Dalles of the Dead* on the Columbia River (in British Columbia) in which twelve people drowned.

James Douglas, chief factor in the absence of Dr. McLoughlin, and three representatives of the Canadians of the Willamette Valley, Joseph Gervais, Stephen Lucier and Pierre Beleque met the two priests at Fort Vancouver on behalf of the French Prairie settlers who had to return home because of the late arrival of the priests at Fort Vancouver.

On January 3, 1839, Fr. Francis Blanchet left Fort Vancouver with Etienne Lucier and Pierre Beleque in two large canoes taking portage around "Wallamette Fall" on January 4, arriving at "Campement de Sable" (Champoeg) on January 5. The men travelled on horseback the last four miles to the log church.

On January 6, 1839, Fr. Francis Norbert Blanchet offered the first Mass in what is now the State of Oregon. It was the Feast of the Epiphany. He blessed