

Spreading the joy of the Gospel, one guitar strum at a time

*Well known for his love of country and gospel music, Father Armand Le Gal, omi, will once again take guitar in hand to give a concert at a local parish – this time at Christ the King parish on February 9. (1) An event that gives us an opportunity to get to know how music has played a role in his personal and priestly life.*



Father Armand Le Gal, with his trusty guitar.

**It seems that throughout the diocese of St. Boniface, in both French and English parishes, you're known for your guitar playing, and your use of country and gospel music, even at mass...**

That's true! I was raised on a farm near Sainte Rose du Lac. Our radio dial was always tuned to CKDM in Dauphin. The station played country music, which became my favourite kind of music.

Beyond my personal tastes, I've found that certain country songs can help proclaim the message of Jesus. Religiously themed country songs express quite well what we live at different times of our life. And if they're chosen with thought and purpose, they can reinforce the message contained in the readings of a liturgical celebration.

**When did you first pick up a guitar?**

I started playing when I was 22. At the time, I was at the Oblate Scholasticate in Battleford, Saskatchewan. I would borrow a fellow seminarian's guitar and practice during recess. I bought a guitar using some money I had received when I was ordained, in the fall of 1971.

**And you've been playing ever since...**

Yes. Music helps me express my feelings and brings me great joy. I suppose that's showed since I began to play, because people have been asking me to play for different meetings and events. I left the seminary in 1972. During my first year as a priest, I served in Toutes-Aides, which is about 40 kilometers north of Sainte Rose du Lac. In 1973, a fiddle player from Rorketon asked me to join his band. We played at curling banquets, wedding anniversaries, etc. I played with the band for about five years.

Playing concerts is a lot of fun. I'm comfortable with a crowd and I like inviting people to sing along and have fun. I appreciate an audience that participates. And one that laughs. I use a lot of humour during a concert.

**Still, it's in the context of faith that your music seems to reach most people...**

True. Fun and faith can go together quite easily. Music, songs and my guitar have served me well. They're great tools for pastoral events and meetings for young and old. When my priesthood brought me to First Nations communities, the Aboriginals appreciated my religious songs, especially if they were in the country music vein.

**You often play with Jeannine Guyot, as you will be doing on February 9.**

When I was priest at Notre-Dame-de-la-Nativité parish in Somerset, between 2011 and 2016, Maurice and Ilene Thévenot encouraged me to record a CD. Jeannine Guyot is a pianist and a singer. I asked her to help me record the songs. Since then, we've organized country gospel concerts. We also play popular tunes.

And we always have a lot of fun. Music is a joyful experience. When people compliment me for my playing and my singing, I tell them that they come from God. I don't read music, so I learn everything by ear. The Lord has given me a good memory and a good ear to help me learn new songs. My talent doesn't come from me. When I reflect on that, I think, "Thank you Lord for your blessings!" I'm often amazed at how God uses me to reach people through songs and music. To Him all praise!

(1) Presented by the Christ the King CWL, A Musical Soirée with Fr. Armand Le Gal & Jeannine Guyot will take place February 9 from 7:30 to 8:30 PM at 847 St. Mary's Rd. Light refreshments after the performance. Tickets: \$ 20. Call: 204-421-0422 (Margaret), 204-255-0159 (Odile), 204-255-4288 (Yvette).