



**Les Fils de la Charité**  
**Région France**

**Louis DUMETZ**  
**1931-2009**

“It is not up to the poor to adapt to us  
but we must adapt to them.”

Louis was born on August 15 1931 in Steenbecque in northern France. He is the eldest of a family of 7 (4 girls and 3 boys). His father was a steelworker in a spring factory. Louis began his studies at the Hazebrouck minor seminary, and then he completed two years of scholastic philosophy at the Merville Grand Seminary. He then went for his military service. After some contacts with Father Bach in Sallaumines, he asked to enter the Sons of Charity. Among the reasons that prompted him to do so was the example of his father who was a past member of the Popular Front; so he writes to Father Boidin in January 1951, but almost apologizing: “It would be betraying my parents to settle into an easy ordinary parish priest life.”

He took his religious vows on September 24, 1955. Then he was called for a few months in Algeria where had begun what was discreetly called “the pacification”. Louis was impressed by the testimony of Archbishop Duval of Algiers, a testimony misunderstood by many. During his formation other priests left their mark on him: Father Godin and Father Meurice. We must mention his veneration for Teresa of Lisieux.

After his ordination in Saint Paul Chapel at Issy-les-Moulineaux, Louis was sent to Colombes where he would remain 10 years, attending mostly the neighborhood of St-Étienne/St-Henri church. Those who have known him mention a personality both sensitive and secret, with a rebellious, rough and anti-authority side that could surprise many, others liked him that way. A family says: “He was a man who could share the simple joys of those for whom he was sent to mission, in fraternity and humanity... and who was always, from day to day, witnessing to his certainty of the unfailing Love that he knew came from God.”

Many also recall the masses he celebrated: his simple and clear preaching (during which he did not stutter), his nice baritone voice: he liked to sing, including arias from operas. He attended to the youths, mostly the girls and it is at that time that he discovered an idyllic site to organize summer camps in the mountains: the hamlet Les Terrasses, just above La Grave, facing one of the most beautiful mountains of the Alps: la Meije. And he went back there every time he could, for camps and for vacations with friends: that is where he charged his batteries. In the Paris area he was faithful to the “mondayists” in Fontainebleau.

In 1970, after a one-year refresher period, he joined the team in Belleville. A small story: each year in St-Jean-Baptiste church, a memorial service is held for the famous French singer Edith Piaf in which many artists had their part. One day, no one was able to sing the Our Father and it is Louis who did so. When leaving, everyone was asking who that unknown artist was.

A Son says that at the time Louis was very open to people involved in the extreme leftist movements just as he was to others who were rather conservative. Someone else who has known him well underlines that Louis was weary about ideologies, already made ideas, great declarations and so he was not a man easy to approach. Some considered him on the fringe. The fact is that he had chosen to be with those on the fringe. He made himself close to the drop-outs, the excluded, those who had nobody. In June 1972, he wrote this in our magazine *Chantiers*: “When society puts on the fringe all those who disturb the world of the healthy and good consumers, the disabled of all kinds, the old people, a whole portion of disoriented youth, that society is sick; its heart is sick.”

And so, while remaining in Belleville, Louis replaced Father Fauvel at the Fresnes jail and became chaplain of the women who had a child with them. It was the beginning of a new period of his life that will lead him in 1977 to become part of the chaplaincy of the Barthélémy Durand psychiatric hospital in Etampes. He would stay there until 2001. He liked that place very much and hardly left it since he had a house of his own there. He was part of a chaplaincy that liked him much. Together they had read the writings of Frédy Kunz.

Louis was known and liked by everyone, not only by the patients with whom he developed all of his listening qualities, but also with the general staff (which happens seldom with priests), and also the trade unions. In his way he was also a therapist: he would take some patients and attendants in the Fontainebleau forest. He had a big success with some women who would embrace him. He used to say with a smile: “I’m their lover.” And this story that he liked to tell with a laugh: one day, at mass, one of the patients asked for prayers so that the chaplain may get well and get out of this nut house. And we add that he would often say that all the nuts were not necessarily where one would think. Finally we must mention all his ties with the Etampes parish where he often gave a hand.

Louis has reached 70. These 24 years at Etampes have worn him out. With the agreement of the Institute, Louis went to his native village where all his family lives. He remains open and caring for the people and friends of the village, and also to what is going on in the world. But finally he got sicker and sicker and died at the Tourcoing hospital where he was very well cared for on Tuesday January 13. He is now in the light where he is reunited with his parents and his brothers Sons of Charity.

For Regional Council of France, *Jacques Robbe fc*

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie fc*