

## **The Man with a Good Heart**

**By Adam Gee**

Imagine. Indigenous men from two tribes are arguing, yelling, and fighting. A white man stands between them. He raises his voice over the noise, talks in a comforting manner, and soothes the enraged First Nations men. In a gentle tone he tries to make peace between the two tribes, the Blackfoot and the Cree. Father Albert Lacombe had a significant role in Canada's past, was responsible for the shaping of present day Southern Alberta, and was a shining example of the leadership that Canadians can pursue and strive to achieve. The peace between the Blackfoot and the Cree was one of many examples of Father Lacombe's roles in Canadian history.

Father Lacombe played an important role in Canada's past that included many different aspects. He made peace between the Blackfoot and Cree tribes. His negotiations with Crowfoot, the Blackfoot chief, led the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway through the Blackfoot territory. Picture a tall, broad shouldered First Nations man speaking to a Caucasian man in an unfamiliar language. That Caucasian man was Father Lacombe. The unfamiliar language, Algonquin, was commonly known amongst the Blackfoot tribes. The white man had learned this foreign language and could negotiate with them easily. The First Nation chief, Crowfoot, was given a choice to accept a treaty that allowed the CPR to pass through his native lands. The missionary, Father Lacombe, had helped him understand the importance of the treaty and convinced him to willingly sign it. Father Lacombe also made sure that Crowfoot and his tribe would not join the North West Rebellion. These three tasks demonstrate that Father Lacombe had an important and unique role in Canada's past.

Through shaping the present day life of Southern Alberta and Calgary, Father Lacombe's actions were significant and lasting. Father Lacombe began a small settlement along the Sturgeon River to serve both the Blackfoot and the Cree. His work among the First Nations tribes earned him the names "The Noble Soul" by the Cree, and "The Man with a Good Heart" by the Blackfoot. This settlement soon became the city north of Edmonton that we call St. Albert. He also oversaw the construction of the first bridge in Alberta across the Sturgeon River in St. Albert. Had negotiating the building of the CPR through the Blackfoot territory not occurred, settlement in the west may never have happened. Father Lacombe's actions led him to accomplish many missions from beginning a settlement, to negotiating the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway through Blackfoot land.

Father Lacombe showed tremendous leadership skills, which all Canadians can strive to achieve. He stood up for what he thought was right and helped the indigenous tribes of Alberta. Others can pursue this type of leadership in many ways throughout their communities. Volunteering in your community, participating at your local church, helping to clean up the environment, shoveling your neighbor's sidewalk, and helping the poor are a few examples of how people nowadays can be a leader and work to be a champion in their communities. Humans today may not be able to settle large disputes between First Nations, or negotiate the construction of a national train, but we can contribute through small, simple deeds to help push our communities forward. Father Lacombe's leadership is an example for all.

Do you remember the white man who made peace between two enraged tribes, the man who negotiated with the Blackfoot chief, and the man who oversaw the construction of Alberta's first bridge? How can we describe this face in Canada's past? Two simple words, Father Lacombe. His role in Canada's past consisted of many different tasks. Father Albert Lacombe had a significant and unique role in Canada's past, important actions in the shaping of present day Southern Alberta, and leadership that Canadians can pursue and strive to achieve in the place we call the world, today.