

**A VICAR FOR INDIANS: FATHER STANISLAUS MAUDLIN, OSB**  
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**by Carol Goss Hoover**

Father Stanislaus Maudlin, OSB, has lived and worked among Indian and non-Indian people of the Dakotas for more than half a century. He has fulfilled the roles of Catholic priest, monk, missionary, Director of the American Indian Culture Research Center, and Vicar for Indians of the Sioux Falls Diocese with compassion and casual charm, humor and courageous energy. He has moved capably and gracefully between cultures across the two states. Today, Father Stan is well-known as an eloquent lecturer, a committed clergyman, a champion of enhanced Indian-white relations, and a "bit of a character."

The word "Catholic," he explains, means universal, inclusive. Therefore, in the Catholic relationship with God, "I can reconcile the German way of prayer, with the Irish way of prayer, with the Italian way of prayer, with the Native American way of prayer. I may not like all of these . . . . I may not want them for myself, but I recognize that they fit someone."<sup>1</sup>

In fulfilling his role as Catholic priest, Father Stan has not wavered from his fundamental belief that a clergyman is a servant. The word clergy is derived from the Latin "to serve." He admits that appropriate service sometimes is difficult for priests because they often must sustain long periods of "silence, of learning, and of humility, to adapt to this reality. It is the

rare clergyman who takes this position as servant very seriously.

Most fail in embracing the humility that is necessary, and as a result open themselves up for burnout, for failure, for wastefulness in building up the kingdom of God. God doesn't want me to build a kingdom in my mode or according to my architecture."

A priest must remain ever-centered in the belief that it is God's Will, not his own, that should be done.<sup>2</sup> A commitment to these principles of the priesthood is the hallmark of Father Stan's career.

As a monk, he is a member of the oldest Roman Catholic religious order, the Benedictine, dating back to 525 AD. Benedict of Nursia witnessed the decay of the Roman Empire, particularly in its cities. He sought an environment that could bring harmony to those individuals who searched for peace with God and the world. The Rule of Saint Benedict and the founding of a religious order created a balanced environment, which included community living and a regimen for each day that encompassed liturgical, meditative, and work segments. The Rule has been interpreted variously over the centuries, but these rudiments of Benedictinism have remained steady. Father Stan and his community continue to embrace them at Blue Cloud Abbey.

"A Benedictine community," he says, "is supported by three foundations: prayer, work, and study. When any of these foundations is allowed to crumble, the whole begins to collapse. We don't come to a monastery to save ourselves, to save our souls.

You can't baptize yourself, you can't forgive your own sins, you can't ordain yourself. There's nothing you can do for yourself. You're saved by Christ; you're saved by others. We must [as Benedictines], we should, try to bring the chaotic parts of the world into harmony . . . try to nurture . . . to beautify. We belong to one place [Blue Cloud] and with that balance afforded by the Rule--from there we can let the glow of our work spread out."<sup>3</sup>

Father Stan was born Irvin James Maudlin on December 16, 1916, in southern Indiana, to an Irish Catholic mother and an English Methodist father.<sup>4</sup> A little Catholic kid in a Protestant town, he learned early to walk down the middle of the street to dodge rocks and other objects hurled at him and his friends going to and from the parochial school. His paternal grandfather was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His Catholic grandmother brought whimsy to his childhood.

[During Prohibition] Grandma Hester, Irish as she was, felt that whisky was certainly not something to be disdained. So she always had a bottle of whisky in her house and always took a supply of it for things that ailed her. For whatever reason, she always asked my father to buy the whiskey for her. This meant that we would get into our car; we would drive out into the country where Dad would know a bootlegger. The bootlegger would take the money; he would take Dad to the edge of a cornfield; give him a shovel and would say 'Now go down through the corn thirty rows, turn right twenty rows.' There invisible to anyone but the crows, Dad would dig gently and soon would uncover the top of a box. Cleaning the dirt away, he would reach down and would get out either a pint or half pint, cover everything up again, scatter the dirt around . . . . We'd come back. Dad would put the bottle under a blanket . . . and I would sit on it. And together, Dad and I would go to Grandma's house.<sup>5</sup>

Grandma Hester's life had a powerful influence on the young boy. She often required him to drink a whole glass of Holy Water before leaving home, to protect him against injury. Although he was as suspicious then as now about the relative merit of this activity, he admits that he never suffered injury in childhood. Spirits might work in mysterious ways.

Grandma Hester endured periodic heart attacks, when Stan was still very young--an experience that caused anxiety and contemplation.

Grandma Hester had periodic attacks and the doctor would be called. He'd go in, visit with her awhile, come out and tell the family that she'd be all right, and had a cup of tea. This impressed me so much, I thought that is what I want to be. I want to be the kind of person to whom everybody looks in emergency. I want to be called, be there a little while, give satisfaction, give hope, give a cure. I'd go out of the door and I'd leave everybody grateful and happy and thankful that I'd been there. So, I wanted to be a doctor.

Then one time the doctor came, visited her, came out, and everything wasn't okay. Mom said, 'call Father Sprigler.' He came, went into Grandma's room--prayed over her, sprinkled her, lighted candles. Then he came out and had a cup of tea. So, the priest had the last word. That's what I wanted to be.

This was no actual commitment, however. As the years passed, Stan's desire to be priest faded until one day he and his best friend, Ed Eder, were together playing and trying to impress the girls, when Ed announced that he was going to Saint Meinrad. Father Stan had never heard of this place. Ed explained that Saint Meinrad Abbey was a community of Benedictine monks who operated a seminary where parish priests were trained. Not

wanting to be without his good friend Ed, twelve-year-old Stan decided he would go there too. Upon telling his mother the news, she was so pleased that she encouraged him to speak immediately to Father Sprigler. He hesitated a few days, then went to see the clergyman. Father Sprigler asked him if any of the other seventh-grade boys wanted to go. "Ed Eder wants to go," he replied.

Young Stan was instructed to get Ed and bring him to Father Sprigler's office. Both boys returned. Everything was falling nicely into place. Stan and his family signed all the appropriate legal papers. Life was good. Unfortunately, Ed's family (which had been completely uninformed of his desire in this regard) refused permission. Ed was NOT going. Stan was committed to go. He was going to be a priest--without Ed.<sup>6</sup>

From these auspicious beginnings, Stan entered minor seminary to become a diocesan priest. Yet, in the fall of 1933 he began to question this vocation. Most of his friends at the seminary would be moving away to parishes. He himself could be assigned anywhere away from family and friends. At about the same time, diocesan funding of tuition for seminarians stopped abruptly. Most could ill-afford to pay this themselves. Stan prepared to leave the seminary, and the priesthood, behind. Fortuitously, one of his instructors approached him and asked if he would like to join Saint Meinrad's Benedictine community itself. This would guarantee his continued theological training to enter the priesthood as well as his continued residence in southern Indiana.

Life was good. Stan was officially launched on his dual path of priest and monk.<sup>7</sup>

Before he completed theological training at Saint Meinrad in 1937, the Abbot approached him with an opportunity to study at a Benedictine college in Rome. As a result, he attended school in Rome, preparing for a doctorate in theology and a minor degree in scripture. His study was interrupted by the union of Hitler and Mussolini, however, which prompted American Embassy officials to remove him and other U.S. citizens from Italy in January 1939. Before leaving Rome, Stan delayed long enough to witness the funeral of Pope Pius XI and the coronation of Pope Pius XII.<sup>8</sup>

Upon returning to Saint Meinrad, he experienced periods of acute anxiety that produced debilitating physical symptoms. He was unable to focus on studies, work, or liturgy. The Abbot suggested a trip to the Dakotas because it was calving time there and mission personnel could use the help. The trip and the work might do him good.

Benedictines operated four missions in the Dakotas in 1939 on the Yankton, Crow Creek, Fort Totten, and Turtle Mountain Indian reservations. Stan spent his first two nights in the late Bishop Martin Marty's quarters at the Sacred Heart Monastery (then convent) in Yankton city.<sup>9</sup> From there he traveled to visit Father Justin Snyder at the Stephan Mission on Crow Creek reservation. "There," he remembers, "I immediately discovered that I was going to be comfortable with these beautiful people, the Dakotas, with

their wisdom, their gentleness, their long suffering, their patience, their cheerfulness, their willingness to accept an ignorant young man such as myself."<sup>10</sup>

Stan spent the summer at Stephan Mission teaching high school classes at the school and acting as personal secretary to Father Justin. He was instructed to participate in an evening study club at old Fort Thompson, which included tribal members who gathered to discuss religion. On his first visit to the club, he recognized his ineffectiveness in trying to convey the heavy theology he had learned in Rome. On his second trip he was convinced that his performance was a disaster as he continued to perceive himself as master of true Christian theology. Repeatedly through his life, Stan has told the following story, which portrays the most significant event of his life.

I caught out of the corner of my eye a man smoking a cigarette, and by the way he flicked the ash off the cigarette, quietly, patiently, a word came to me from that gesture. He was saying to himself, 'My God, when is this young man going to shut up.' I knew I needed help. To my right and in the back of me sat the old gentleman who had been the catechist for years at this place . . . Mr. Clem Wounded Knee. God bless Mr. Clem Wounded Knee . . . His words swept me up, picked me up, turned me around, and thrust me in a whole new direction in my life. I turned to Mr. Wounded Knee and I said, 'What do you think?' I was begging him to support me . . . Well, these old people were so gentle, they don't want to hurt you, to show up your ignorance. So I had a hard time getting him to say anything. But finally, he looked up at me, in the watery kind of an old man's eye, and said, 'Father, don't you know that God is nice?' [Not] in all my years at parochial school, in the years in the seminary, in the years I spent in Rome, had I heard that word applied to God. He is nice. How wonderful.<sup>11</sup>

In a single evening, Stan was changed. The year 1939 had already included his fleeing Rome, illness upon return, first experience with the culture of the Dakotas, and participation in the first Tekakwitha Conference. This conference evolved into a vehicle for Catholic missionaries in Indian country to gather, to share ideas, and to critique themselves annually. Although it originated as a regional meeting, it since has become a national convention that includes Indian people as well as non-Indian missionaries. It has been one of many activities in Father Stan's crowded life that propelled him into a national arena.

He returned to Saint Meinrad in the fall to continue his studies, which he did from 1939 to his ordination in 1942. In the summers of 1940 and 1941, the Abbot assigned him to Father Sylvester Eisenman, at Marty Mission on the Yankton Reservation, to assist in the building of Saint Paul's Church.

During the two years [summers] I was at Marty I decided I wanted to learn the Dakota language. South of Marty lived an old lady, rather famous in pictures and stories. Her name was Unci, which means grandma, White Tallow. In whatever moments I had free, and Father Sylvester did not give his workmen much free time, I walked over to Unci's home and sat on the floor with her and tried in my halting way to learn the Dakota language from her. I listened to her and wrote down every word I could understand, memorized it, came back to the mission, picked up the Bible, read the Bible in Dakota, did my best to learn to speak as Unci told me.<sup>12</sup>

After ordination in 1942 Father Stan received his first permanent assignment--at Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation in North Dakota. His exposure to Sioux culture did not prepare him for this very different Indian group.<sup>13</sup> Training in Dakota

language was not appropriate. Now he was required to comprehend the Michef language, with its unique mixture of cultural influences that merged along the Canadian border. The Indians at Turtle Mountain had experienced a history very different from that of their Sioux neighbors, and had embraced Roman Catholicism long before Father Stan arrived. For the next eight years, he performed pastoral work (marriage instruction, baptisms, home visits, catechetical work, and sick calls.) Additionally, he established and coached the Saint Ann's School basketball team (as any respectable Hoosier would.)<sup>14</sup>

His years at Turtle Mountain were full of activity and ceremony, and Father Stan remembers them fondly (except for that time he burned down Saint Benedict's Church). For eight years he moved harmoniously among these Indian people. However, the Benedictines serving in the Dakotas, from the arrival of Martin Marty in 1876 to the 1940s, had need of a monastery or a stable community closer to their missions than was Saint Meinrad in southern Indiana. It had always been difficult for these communal monks to be away from their home base for such long periods of time. "During all those years we monks had not been rooted . . . . You have to take your nourishment from the soil and the rain and the wind and the sun . . . . We knew that this [the monastery] was needed to be stable."<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, the Abbot of Saint Meinrad gave the monks in the Dakotas authority to locate a site for their own monastery.

Father Stan was in the group charged with the task. The monks considered sites in Fargo, Aberdeen, Pierre, Stephan, Yankton, and Pipestone to no avail. Tired from so much travel, they rested at Summit, South Dakota. While there, they asked if land were available in the area. Someone directed them to Oscar Casperson in Marvin, a small town close by. Mr. Casperson told the monks he had substantial property for sale, overlooking the valley, but the monks would have to bid like everyone else. He sent them to the First Dakota Bank in Milbank, and advised them to ask for a Mr. Benedict. Benedict? The monks interpreted this as a divine message encouraging them in their success. They submitted their bid, which won in November 1949. The site of purchase became the location of the present Blue Cloud Abbey.<sup>16</sup>

In 1950 Father Stan was reassigned to North Dakota's Fort Totten Indian Reservation as the superintendent of Saint Michael's boarding school. He was back among the Sioux. As superintendent he became an administrator for the first time, charged with handling a budget that was in trouble. By his own admission, he was unprepared for this task and did not succeed in improving the financial situation. However, in 1953 he began to believe that holding children in the school over weekends, holidays, and summers was not in their best interest. With his gift of subtle persuasion, he began to introduce slowly the concept of changing the boarding institution to a day school. The sisters (the legendary Gray Nuns) warned that if the children were allowed to

return home, they would never return. Father was patient, yet steadfast. Finally, he watched with some trepidation as the children went home from school for the first time, worrying about his boldness in this regard. He was vindicated, however, when not only these children returned at the appropriate time with parental support, but they also brought others with them.<sup>17</sup>

"I look back at those years at Saint Michael's and wonder how anyone could have put up with me. The work was absolutely incompatible with my nature. I'm sure everyone else was aware of my inability, and this could be said of the sisters. They were the heart of the mission, and they were the shapers of its past and even of its present. Those poor nuns put up with me for seven years, and I'll always love them for that."<sup>18</sup>

Father Stan's failure to master financial management and general administration has been a blessing, he says. Had he succeeded at Saint Michael's, he might have "deteriorated into a bureaucratic functionary, unrelated to the real world of loving people."<sup>19</sup> His time at Saint Michael's, although painful, became a success in that the day school was established, and by the 1970s, when the Benedictines began turning schools over to tribes, Fort Totten tribal residents were ready because of the parent involvement and self-determination previously initiated by Father Stan.

His next assignment was one as pastor, back in South Dakota at the Stephan Mission, on the Crow Creek reservation. His parish

included Fort Thompson, Big Bend, and Pierre--a territory too large to cover effectively. He enlisted the aid of Father Casimir Kot to serve Fort Thompson, and Father Stan divided his time between the other two. In the decade he was assigned there, he ran the parish, built a residence that was open always to parishioners, coached basketball (of course), moved the church building (reassembling the steeple in a basement).

In those days there were hard times in Pierre.

Beyond my church there were no street lights, no water lines, no telephones. I was the person to whom everyone could come to get water, to make a phone call, to take a shower.

There was much relationship but little money. We are all related.<sup>20</sup>

One story serves to illustrate Father Stan's role in the decade he was assigned here. A young man died in the hospital and the undertaker appeared. He took the body, and then discovered it was an Indian boy. Still in an undertaker's sack, the body was simply dropped off at the agency doorstep. Outraged, Father Stan contacted the state Attorney General to inquire about the law regarding burial processes. It became apparent that the state and the undertakers required more money than many poor families could afford. He decided to initiate some type of funeral operation in the parish that would meet legal standards, yet be respectfully cost effective and available to the poor. Enlisting the aid of Larry Young Bear, Father Stan purchased a table saw and began constructing coffins. Bodies could be transported in his station wagon. He reduced the cost of a funeral from about \$600 to only

\$85. No longer would anyone in the parish be required to mortgage a home to sponsor a burial.<sup>21</sup>

From 1966 to 1967, following his ten years at Pierre, Father transferred back to Turtle Mountain, as superintendent of St. Ann's School. Like his time as superintendent at Saint Michael's, he began to introduce more and more parent involvement. He also improved textbooks by requiring a small tuition payment. He coached basketball.

He was called to Blue Cloud Abbey in 1967 to establish the American Indian Culture Research Center. The Center was a product of a new direction in the Catholic Church, a result of the Second Vatican Council, which included the view that other religions were not simply to be tolerated or even respected; but were to be perceived as something important, not only about themselves, but also about God, about life, even about Christ.<sup>22</sup>

In a letter, Father Stan expressed his own view: "In all the advance and push that the Indian has been subjected to, his heart has been neglected. He has been bombarded with education (that's fine), with housing (wonderful), with job opportunities (great). But in great measure his private soul has been passed by--his artistic soul, his religious soul, his cultural soul . . . ." <sup>23</sup>  
Based on this fervent belief, the Center was founded to accomplish two missions: to support emerging Indian leaders as they attempted to rebuild those institutions that had been destroyed--family, education, law and order, economy, church; and to help, by this

ministry, to raise up non-Indian respect--respect for Indian spirituality, philosophy of life, dreams.<sup>24</sup> To that end, Father Stan and a staff at the Center envisioned and performed a variety activities from establishing an American Indian Leadership Council; to assigning mission personnel; to arranging adoptions across cultural lines when appropriate; to lecturing across the region; to responding to requests about Indian people from around the world; to creating a resource center with books, articles, photographs, art, and artifacts; to building a sound room for broadcasting; to accumulating sophisticated video equipment for the making of documentary films.

To accomplish all that was necessary as Director of the Center, Father Stan had to be far more mobile than before. To facilitate this mobility across the large geographic area he had to cover, the people at Turtle Mountain began fundraising for flying lessons. From 1967 to 1981, Father Stan, the pilot, covered his territory as quickly as possible.

In April, 1979, Father Stan received a call from the staff at Turtle Mountain, requesting that he conduct a prayer service on Butte Saint Paul in the sacred Turtle Mountains. There are several places in the hills that have "been sanctified by tradition and God's action." The Butte is a high hill where young Indian men went to fast and pray before European intrusion. Father Stan traveled to the Turtle Mountains that summer, carrying a buffalo skull, four flags, sweetgrass, a drum, and a buffalo

robe, to conduct a ceremony that was both Christian and Indian. Donning the garb of the original French priests (who were the first Catholic clergy to serve the Turtle Mountain Band) and with Sacred Pipe in hand, he conducted a holy ritual that symbolized the beauty of cross-cultural understanding and respect.<sup>25</sup>

In 1983 Father Stan was asked by the Bishop of the Sioux Falls Diocese to become its Vicar for Indians. "Vicar" means "in place of." Father Stan's job, then, was to act as a liaison between the diocesan Indian community and the bishop. He would represent the bishop at meetings, conferences, ceremonies. As Vicar, he had no actual jurisdiction, no sacramental duties; rather, he acted as a channel of communication between the office and the community. Thus he served until 1992, when he resigned because of ill health.

Measuring the sum of such a career is difficult, and the career is still unfinished. In 1994 Father Stan works as Director of the American Indian Culture Research Center and is still active in pastoral work in North and South Dakota. In his opinion, the most telling and wonderful statement of his life so far is that on five different occasions Indian people bestowed upon him a high honor--an Indian name. Sacred and powerful names came from the Sioux, the Turtle Mountain Band, and the Blackfoot tribe. Yet his first name, the one he uses most often, came early in his career, while building the church at Martyr, and visiting Grandma White Tallow:

One day, after I felt a little more comfortable with the

language, I said to her, 'Unci, I feel a little disappointed. I've known you for several months and I hear you talking about Father Tim and you call him Ihnaktowan Hoksina (Yankton Boy.) You talk about Father Dan and call him Zica Tamaheca (Thin Squirrel.) But you did not give me a name. Her eyes widened, surprise came to her face, a little irritation came to her voice and she said, 'Well, you've been coming here, I've been teaching you and you never yet did give me a present.' With that I was ashamed. Now she said, 'Don't you come back for two weeks.' I thought that was punishment.

When the two weeks had gone by, I began to wonder what I could bring Unci. I thought and thought during those two weeks, and finally I found what I thought would be a good present for her. Way in the back of a drawer, I found a two pound can of Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco. I knew that she would enjoy the tobacco--at least I thought she would.

So on the day appointed I put the tobacco can under my arm and went back toward Unci's home. I had to climb a small rise in the prairie. When I got to the top of the rise I looked at her home and there were a couple of saddle horses, a buck board, a buggy, and old Model T or Model A. I'm kind of a shy person and I didn't want to meet all those people, but it was extremely hot and I didn't want to go back from Unci's house without delivering my present. So I kept on.

I got into the little home (about twelve by twelve) and there on the floor sat everyone with backs against the wall, smiling very, very happily. It's the presence that's important, not the conversation. Feeling shy as I said, I found Unci against the wall and I sat down next to her. Everyone was smiling and looking at me and greeting me with their eyes.

After a few moments . . . Four Generations reached behind him and got a little drum. Slowly, quietly he began to pray on the drum. Slowly, quietly, everyone moved back and forth, right and left in their seats--in movement with his voice and the tempo of his beating. We were praying together. Eyes were closed and the spirits were fervent. The silence came and Unci stood up. She straightened her dress, got out into the middle of the room, the drum picked up a different beat and Unci began a quiet woman's dance. Others stood up. It was a long, long, prayer, a long, long ceremony and I sat in wonder at the prayerfulness and the spirituality and the sincerity and the solemnity of it all.

At length, Unci came to me, 'Hoksina,' she said, 'Stand here.' So I stood in front of her and she and the others danced around and around me. At length in her old crackling voice, she said to me in Indian, 'Your name now is Wambdi Wicasa (Eagle Man.)' They had a prayer for me, they had a song for me, and then sat down very, very happy. Then someone went outside to bring in the food they had prepared.

It took me a long time of meditation and thought and teaching to know the power of that name, Wambdi Wicasa.

The Wambdi is the Eagle, the creature closest to God. When the Wambdi is close to God it doesn't have to work at flying, it's lifted up by the rising warmth of Mother Earth. It's lifted up high, high toward Father . . . Then Wicasa, man--very few people are given the name of man. The name means someone who is mature, someone who is silent, quiet, and thoughtful, and prayerful. Manliness is a great power, a great medicine.

So I walk in the power of that name.<sup>26</sup>

- 1.Stan Maudlin Oral Diary, Northern State University Oral History Center, SMOD 82-72.
- 2.SMOD 88-125; SMOD 89-130.
- 3.SMOD 89-133; SMOD 72-6; SMOD 77-31.
- 4.To prevent confusion, "Father Stan" will be called "Stan" until his ordination in 1942. The writer has chosen not to use his birth name (Irvin) for these early years so as not to confuse the reader. Father Stan would have been called Irvin until he chose the name Stanislaus when he became a Benedictine.
- 5.SMOD 77-24.
- 6.SMOD 68-1s
- 7.SMOD 68-1s.
- 8.SMOD 77-29.
- 9.SMOD 84-86.
- 10.SMOD 77-29. Father Stan's use of the term "Dakota" is meant to encompass Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people. Specifically, the Indian people of Crow Creek are Yanktonais (Nakota).
- 11.SMOD 77-22.
- 12.SMOD 87-120.
- 13.The use of the term "Sioux" is meant to include Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people, with apologies. Father Stan had been exposed, by this time, to all three. The dialect in which he was trained was Dakota.
- 14.SMOD 77-29.
- 15.SMODsp 92-10. (From Father Stan' presentation at the 1992 South Dakota History Conference, Augustana College, Sioux Falls.)
- 16.SMODsp 92-10.
- 17.SMOD 77-30.
- 18.SMOD 87-113.
- 19.SMOD 87-110.
- 20.SMOD 87-120.
- 21.SMOD 87-120.

22.McBrien, Richard P. Catholicism: Volume I. Winston Press, 1980, 270.

23.Letter to Harold Shunk of 11/10/67. American Indian Culture Research Center (AICRC) file, Center for Western Studies, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

24.SMOD sp 92-10.

25.SMOD 81.67.

26.SMOD 87-120.