"I became a composer almost by accident," wrote Lucien Deiss. "I used to do ministry in the little church of Bon Pasteur, close to the seminary. I wanted the parishioners to sing a lot more, so I formed a Gregorian Chant choir. But it didn’t work. I realized that the people knew almost nothing of the Bible, so I decided to try using music to help them memorize its more important texts."

So began the composition of more than 460 hymns and canticles which were translated into many different languages, including Chinese. The choirs and parishioners that sung his songs were widely international. His music was extremely popular in the United States. He used to joke that he was better known there than in France where he grew up and where, apart from a few years on the staff of the seminary in Brazzaville, he spent all his years as a Spiritan. Ill health had forced him to return from the Congo. His death on October 9, 2007 came after a long illness.

In the United States he was awarded the prize for the best pastoral musician of the year in 1992. Some of his collections of hymns and canticles had a print run of more than five million copies. “I used music to help people memorize the bible,” he would say.

He traveled widely giving courses in scripture and liturgy as well as retreats in many parts of Africa, Latin America and Taiwan. He liked nothing better than to share his expertise and enthusiasm with ordinary people and their pastors. VICS invited him to its summer institute in Toronto in the 1970s.

The church of Vatican II is indebted to this pastoral composer for such hymns and canticles as Keep in Mind, My Soul is Longing for your Peace, All the Earth, Grant to us O Lord, All you Nations. For nearly fifty years Lucien continued to set the word of God to music.

The World Library of Sacred Music wrote of him: “His Biblical Hymns and Psalms was the first significant way that millions of Catholics in North America came to sing the Word of God and treasure it in their hearts.”

On October 13, 2007 his Spiritan confreres and a large number of people joined in singing his beautiful hymn which had accompanied so many others to their place of rest:

"On the day when the morning star will arise in your heart,
On the day when its glory will shine on you in all its splendour,
On the day when it will wipe away the tears from your eyes,
On that day, face to face, you will see God our Father."

Lucien Deiss CSSp
1921–2007
Bishop Maurice Piat visits Canada

The Spiritan bishop of Port Louis, Mauritius, Monsignor Maurice Piat CSSp, visited Toronto from October 5-8, 2007 as part of his second North American Pastoral Visit to the Mauritian communities on this side of the ocean.

The tour took him from Montreal to Ottawa, Toronto to Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver and finally to Washington. Much of the pastoral visit here was arranged and co-ordinated by the Emmaus Companions, a Catholic lay group of Mauritians living in the greater Toronto area.

The Spiritans have a long association with the island of Mauritius dating from the 19th century and of course our own Blessed Jacques Laval ministered there for over twenty years until his death in 1864.

On his first day in Toronto, Bishop Piat dropped into the Spiritans’ Laval House where he met old friends whom he had known in Mauritius. The following day he gave a full day of reflection to an eager crowd of Mauritians and the next day bigger crowds congregated at St. Patrick’s Church in downtown Toronto for Sunday Mass, followed by celebrations and food which reflected the rich diversity and culture of the island of Mauritius.

Thanksgiving Monday saw the gathering of hundreds of Mauritians in Scarborough for a fund-raising event hosted by Trait d’Union Canada-Maurice. Later that evening, the final stop in Toronto for Bishop Piat was at the Spiritan formation house, the Des Places Community, where the Emmaus Companions had gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and Canadian Thanksgiving with their beloved Bishop.

Adrian van Kaam CSSp 1920 – 2007
Duquesne Professor, Founder of Institute of Formative Spirituality

Father Adrian van Kaam founded the Institute of Formative Spirituality in the 1960s. He emphasized how spirituality is shaped and how faith is to be lived out in daily life.

His understanding of these areas of life was formed as he smuggled food to Jews in hiding during the Nazi occupation of Holland in the 1940s. Believing that liberation was imminent, he went to a retreat in western Holland and was trapped behind Nazi lines. He hid in a barn, but rounded up food to take to Jews and others in hiding. There he endured the “hunger winter” of 1944-45, when the Dutch people survived on turnips, potatoes and toxic tulip bulbs — a starvation diet that permanently affected his health.

“He believed there are no coincidences, only providences,” said his long time colleague Susan Muto. “He believed that it was providential, because of his future mission, that he was catapulted out of an ivory tower of seminary into the Dutch hunger winter.”

Father van Kaam gained a reputation for helping people apply their faith to daily life. Appointed to replace a deceased psychology professor at Duquesne University in 1954, he protested he had no psychology degree. He was sent to get one.

When he founded the Institute of Formative Spirituality he was inundated with sisters and priests seeking to reshape their spirituality after Vatican II.

In 1980 he suffered a near fatal heart attack. Forbidden to do work of any kind, he begged Dr. Muto to smuggle in a notebook and a pen. “I cannot rest if I cannot write,” he told her. He produced The Blessing of a Coronary.

Two years before he died, Father van Kaam told a graduate student, “Follow your heart. Do not let pressures of careerism, money-making, or fame and fortune confuse your original ideals to make a difference in this world and to make it a better place when you leave it.”