1776—A.D.

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(T.P Religion Editor)

While the year 1776 was a milestone in American history for the 13 Colonies, it was just another year as far as the Catholic Church in Louisiana was concerned.

Only two really significant events took place that year in the Spanish-dominated territory, one being the death of a leading priest, and the other the erection of a new church on Bayou Tesson, in the general area of present-day Opelousas. Otherwise, it was just another trying and frustrating year for the handful of priests covering a huge area with too little manpower.

Father Dagobert de Longuory, who had been the superior of the French Capuchins in the colony, died on May 31, after serving in the colony for 33 years, under both French and Spanish rule. His death symbolized the end of the French Capuchin service in Louisiana, although four others of the order were to remain a few years longer in the area. Upon Father Dagobert’s death, Father Cirillo de Barcelona, superior of the Spanish Capuchins, became the leading clergyman in the colony and pastor of St. Louis Parish Church in New Orleans.

In the hinterlands, Father Valentin, a French Capuchin, was serving as pastor as “La Iglesia de la Immaculada Concepcion del Puerto de Opelousas” was constructed, about one mile north of Opelousas. The name was later changed to St. Landry, the French version of St. Leander, and the name which the civil parish would become known by in later years.

Father Valentin, like Father Dagobert a veteran missionary in the Louisiana colony, served at just about every mission church site from Natchitoches to New Orleans during his term of service in Louisiana.

St. Francis Church at Pointe Coupee was without a pastor for the early part of 1776 until Father Luis de Quintanilla, a Spanish Capuchin, paused there to minister to the faithful while en route to an assignment at Natchitoches. In the fall of 1776, Father Valentin left his newly built church in Opelousas to take charge of this mission church, along with his Opelousas congregation.

The church of St. James at Cahabanosse (now St. James, La.) was not without difficulties at the time of the American nation’s birth. Gov. Unzaga took the occasion of a land dispute at St. James that year, between Gabriel Peyroux de la Roche Molive and Miguel Chaison and Francois Antaille to urge the commandant, Jacques Cantrelle, to see to it that contributions to the church by the residents be forthcoming. In connection with this, Unzaga had the court require presentation of receipts for contributions to the church in its proceedings.