



Fr. Joseph B. Danel, S.J.

(1921-2012. In Zambia 1980-2012)

25 January 2012

Fr Joseph Danel once wrote: "I can never remember a time when I did not want to be a Jesuit because I believe my vocation goes back to when I was a year old!" He was born in Seattle, USA, on 11 October 1921, the first child of Joseph and Sarah Rose (Green) Danel. At the time of his birth, Joe's mother was not a Catholic. When she was undergoing instructions, a Jesuit Brother babysat with young Joe. He believed his vocation was given to him at that time.

Joe entered the Jesuit Novitiate in Sheridan, Oregon in 1939, took his vows two years later and moved to the juniorate, which was on the other side of the large building. There he studied the classics and humanities for two years before moving to Mt St Michael's in Spokane, Washington where he studied philosophy for three years.

Throughout his third year of philosophy, Joe pushed his superiors to send him to Alaska for regency, a mission he had become interested in when he was much younger. The provincial agreed and Joe was sent to Holy Cross Mission in the interior. During the year, a number of problems ensued: he heard his mother was dying of cancer; he was depressed and he wondered about his Jesuit vocation. His mother died in the spring of next year and Joe felt more turmoil within him. Eventually it was decided that he should return to the lower States. He was assigned to Seattle Prep School for the next year of his regency.

Joe learned two important things from this experience. First, he decided he "would never ask for anything again unless [he] was indifferent" and although he had a tendency to be "stiff and rigid and the law was everything," he found out that he "was human and weak and needed to show kindness and love." For two years, first at Seattle Prep and then at Bellarmine Prep, Joe had an enjoyable and successful teaching experience. On completing his regency he moved to Alma College in California, to study theology. After three years of theology in 1952, Joe was ordained a priest in Spokane.

After a fourth year of theology in Alma College, Joe was assigned to teach at Seattle Prep once again. At the end of that year he went to Port Townsend, Washington for his tertianship.

Afterwards Joe did two years as Socius to the Novice Master in Sheridan, OR. Then he was sent to the newly opened Jesuit High School in Portland, OR, where he remained for seventeen years. The first years of the school, the pioneering years, were among Joe's happiest as a Jesuit. At Jesuit High he taught all those years and also on various occasions served as bursar and Vice-principal.

In 1976 Joe was assigned to Spokane as an Assistant Tertian Master in the newly opened tertianship. During the two six month sessions, Joe helped direct tertians through the Spiritual Exercises. Many young Jesuits from Zambia did their tertianship in Spokane at that time. When one session of the tertianship was

cancelled in 1980, Joe requested to come to Zambia for six months to give retreats. His primary purpose was to understand better the Zambian situation, about which he heard so much from the tertians.

After six months of giving retreats and workshops, Joe was asked by a number of Jesuits if he might consider returning to Zambia more permanently. He did so the following year and was missioned to Canisius Secondary School, teaching religious education to the boys and being available for spiritual direction and retreat work. At 60 years old, he felt that he might be able to make a contribution to the work for a few years.

Two years later he was asked to be the bursar of the school. He accepted the work because he saw the need, but it was a painful move for him. Although a heavy burden, Joe faithfully carried out the work for six years.

He was transferred to Charles Lwanga Teachers' College in 1989. The move from the bursar's office and to a college dealing with more mature students, revitalized him. He continued teaching religious education, was involved in the chaplaincy, taught regular classes to the Holy Spirit Sister novices once a week, continued to give spiritual direction and occasional retreats.

For over ten years he worked happily in the College. However, when the Ministry of Education introduced a new program for teacher education that emphasized methods but was low in content, Joe was upset and asked for a change. He was also 81 years old.

The last ten years of his life he spent at Xavier House with his main work assisting in the Province Library. During those ten years he patiently entered 20 000 volumes in the library into the computer. He was also in demand throughout these years for spiritual direction and retreat work and for many years helping the Novice Master direct novices through the Spiritual Exercises. The Jesuit novices dubbed him 'The Guru' as did the Holy Spirit novices before them.

Joe lived a very regular life of which prayer was always an important part. He was up before 04 30 h and in the chapel by 05 00. There he would pray the Prayer of the Church and then sit quietly before the tabernacle for an hour. This was usually followed by the Eucharist which was an essential part of the day. Even during his last illness when he was unable to do much for himself, he would ask the nurse to bring him to the novitiate chapel in mid-morning to spend an hour there.

In August 2011 he had a fall which bruised his right hand badly. As a result he could not use the hand to take care of his basic needs. He was moved to Chula House shortly afterwards. Joe never regained his strength. He died on 25 January 2012 and was buried, at his own request, in his beloved Chikuni.