



**Fr Charles O'Connor, S.J.**  
**(1920-2014. In Zambia 1954-1968)**

**3 February 2014**

Fr. Charles (Charlie) O'Connor died in Dublin on 3 February. He was born on 12 December 1920, entered the Society on 7 September 1938 at Emo and did the usual stages of formation in Ireland. He was ordained on 31 July 1952 in Dublin. He came to Zambia in 1954 after tertianship. He studied chiTonga in Chivuna where he took his final vows in 1955. He stayed in Zambia until 1968, primarily working at Charles Lwanga College as chaplain and lecturer.

He was a lovely man to have around, gentle, cheerful, life-affirming, with a sense of fun that can be gathered from the picture of him in a misplaced biretta. The telegraphic register of his life – what we call the curriculum vitae – lists the places he knew and the jobs he held: born in Ballybunion, Co Kerry, reared and schooled in Cork city, worked as a Jesuit in Ireland, Zambia, Britain and the Holy Land. The line-by-line catalogue spills over onto a second page. Yet its length is irrelevant.

Charlie held a variety of jobs, as teacher, treasurer, retreat-giver and administrator. He was versatile and adaptable, but he was much more than the sum of his occupations. One might have expected that having survived to the age of 93, he would have few acquaintances around to attend his funeral and mourn his passing. Not so. The crowds who gathered in Cherryfield for his removal, and in Milltown Park chapel for the Requiem Mass, reflected a variety of contacts with Charlie. For all of them he was a friend who made a difference. He was an open book to his friends, and most of them responded with the same openness.

It is hard to do justice to all his ministries, but one could pick out his pilgrimages to the Holy Land over many years. Charlie would give the scriptural, historical, spiritual dimension to the pilgrimage, while his devoted friend Catherine McCann managed the logistics of the travel and made sure nobody got lost. Those who were privileged to explore the Holy Land with Charlie and Catherine gained a sense of Jesus in his human setting that stayed with them. It was Catherine above all who nursed Charlie into a gentle old age and kept vigil beside him through the final days and nights. Theirs was a deep and enviable friendship which nourished them both.