

3 March

## **Fr JAMES BERRY**

26 January 1932 – 3 March 2012

Jim was born in India (Bellampalli) but he grew up in Glasgow. He entered the novitiate at 17 in Harlaxton where he was noted for his 'lively intelligence and good humour'. He excelled in all the sports available and was 'secure in his vocation' (Joe Munitiz). Posted to St Aloysius, Glasgow, he was talked of as the next head of the school but it was not to be. 'He was the best headmaster the college never had.' He was sent St Ignatius, Chishawasha, in 1971, to steady the college after it had a succession of heads, each lasting only a couple of years.



He was to be there for 14 years and they were often tumultuous times. Jim quickly grasped the situation; the students had high hopes but they were frustrated by the skewed politics of the Rhodesians. He had to deal with the visits of the police and CID and he quietly but firmly defused situations that might have gone seriously wrong, as when the students overturned a police vehicle. When the students marched to Salisbury, he accompanied them to be their spokesman when there was an inevitable confrontation with police.

Brian Enright tells us the college was understaffed and underfunded yet he managed to work with the staff, Jesuit and lay, as well as the Mary Ward Sisters to consolidate progress. Girls entered the sixth form; a chapel was built as well as laboratories and a lecture theatre. New dormitories were added and houses for teachers. Jim supported every activity in the school including, of course, the different sports.

Brian Porter described Jim as a great headmaster: 'He used to wander round the classroom area noticing the behaviour of both the pupils and teachers. He expected the housemasters to show a personal interest in the pupils living in their houses as he did for all those living in the school and so he managed to combine firm discipline with kindness and understanding. It was largely through this attitude that the standard of study and exam achievement improved until St Ignatius was seen to be the best in the country.'

Towards the end of the war, Jim had to deal with the guerrillas who visited the college. Again, he had to be diplomatic as well as firm with them. Then the police would come and question him about these contacts. He simply told them 'Yes', he did have contact with the 'boys' (guerrillas) and 'Yes', he did help them. 'Do you know this is illegal?' 'Yes!' Will you do it again if you meet them? 'Yes!'

In the new era after independence, it was decided that Jim might try his skills and use his experience at St George's which was in 'partial denial' (Mark Hackett) about the new dispensation. But Jim met resistance both from the Jesuits and the lay staff and he found his years as rector frustrating and difficult. He was happy to have a complete change and go to Braeside as a parish priest. He was there for five years before moving to the Cathedral for a further twelve years. He adapted to this new life in pastoral work and brought to it his usual energy and attention to detail. He also knew how to take time off on the golf course and in the evenings, he would watch a video. He was uncomfortable with some of the changes in the Society and seems to have felt they were sometimes changes for change's sake. In 2009, he retired to the House of Adoration as chaplain to the aged Dominican sisters and died the day before he was due to move to Richartz House.