



Fr Denis Flannery, S.J.
(1930-1999. In Zambia 1957-1999)

8 March 1999

Denis was born in Dublin, Ireland, on the 2 December 1930. He attended the Holy Faith Convent School and Belvedere College for his secondary education. He was a member of the photographic club in 'Belvo' and toured the many historical sites around Dublin in that capacity. In September 1949, he entered the novitiate at Emo, followed by the juniorate and philosophical studies after vows. Four of his year were assigned to go to Zambia for regency but Denis was not one of them. However, one of the four asked that he be sent to Hong Kong, so Denis was then assigned to Zambia. How Providence works!

When he came to Zambia he worked in Monze and then went to Fumbo in the valley for a year to struggle with chiTonga while living with Fr Joe McDonald. Then he had two years at Canisius Secondary School, the beginning of his life-long contact with youth.

After his theology and ordination at Milltown Park on 31st July 1963, he flew out once again to Zambia, to Monze. Bishop Corboy, of the newly established diocese of Monze (1962), saw the need for a minor seminary (a secondary school) to nurture young boys who might have a vocation to the priesthood. Fr Denis was asked to be the headmaster of Mukasa and opened the first Form 1 with the help of two scholastics, Paddy Joyce and Clive Dillon-Malone. He remained there until 1970 putting Mukasa on a firm footing. He moved to Fumbo for a year as parish priest and then returned to Monze to be a teacher and chaplain at Monze Government Secondary School, for 14 years until 1985. He came again to Mukasa as headmaster from 1986 to 1990 when the need arose. With all his experience behind him, Denis now became a traveling chaplain in the diocese to the Catholic Teachers in primary schools. He was also Monze Diocesan vocations promoter and spiritual director of the Monze major seminarians. The diocesan Newsletter written by him for many years, always had 'full' pages for reading.

That was Denis the 'activist'. What about Denis the man?

He was a devoted priest and Jesuit, devoted to the poor and the sick. Wherever he went he had the Holy Oils with him ready to anoint the seriously sick.

He was a strict disciplinarian in the schools, whether in Mukasa or Monze Secondary. As headmaster, he could be quite radical in the sense that he would send home a whole class for infringements of discipline. He knew the name of every boy in the school, even the hundreds in Monze Secondary. While in Monze one evening, as he passed the Freedom Bar, he spotted a few Monze boys (boarders) enjoying themselves inside - out of bounds, of course. Out came Denis' note book and down went the names even though they scattered in the crowd. He did not have to ask anyone.

Denis seemed to revel in adversity! Crises attached themselves to him. Someone once said that, if there was no crisis, Denis would make one! Twice he came across dead bodies on the main road and like the Good Samaritan, he did not pass by.

The Boy Scout Movement had a special place in his heart from the time he was a scholastic. He kept up this interest even in his busy life becoming coordinator of the Boy Scouts in the Southern Province of Zambia.

Service was uppermost in his life. He was ready to drive down the Valley to Chipepo Secondary School for a Sunday Mass even after having had a church service in Monze in the morning. If a football match needed a referee, Denis was there. Sports and clubs

saw him as active and at times dramatic! And he loved to regale his fellow Jesuits with the events and incidents (of which there were many!) in which he was involved especially late at night. Midnight often did not register with him.

His last years with cancer were painful ones. Cherryfield in Dublin was where he was for many months. He hated to be alone and always wished for the company of his sisters, his fellow Jesuits and his friends. The Mass was central to his suffering life and he said or attended it each day in his room. In the last weeks the way he carried his suffering became for those who were with him an example of great courage and faith.