



F. Leon Kapfer, S.J.
(1921-2016. In Zambia 1964-1974)

10 March 2016

Fr Leon (Lee) Philip Kapfer, an identical twin, was born on December 20, 1921, in Spokane, Washington to Phillip L and Ellen Mary (Lesh) Kapfer. He grew up in the Hillyard area of Spokane with his twin brother Leslie and older sister Virginia, enjoying a deep comradery among the many Catholics families living in the area. Lee graduated from Gonzaga High School in 1940 and that same summer entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Sheridan, OR. He followed the regular course of Jesuit formation studies and teaching experiences and was ordained a priest on June 20, 1953 in Spokane.

A strong athlete, dedicated high school teacher, missionary to Africa, fund raiser, parish priest, and friend of many, Fr Kapfer was known for his quiet and steady way of proceeding, regardless of the complexities of the situation.

Lee and the secondary school world were a comfortable fit for each other; his classroom was a serious place and the athletic field was a place where he helped form the character of many young men. For nine years (1955 to 1964) he lent his talents to Bellarmine Preparatory School in Tacoma, WA.

In 1964 he came to Zambia. After studying chiNyanja in Malawi, he began teaching at Mpima Minor Seminary. In 1967 he was appointed Mission Superior of the Lusaka Mission, a post that he held for two years when the Lusaka Mission and the Chikuni Mission were joined to form the Province of Zambia. When the Province was formed he went back to teaching at Mpima; after a few years there he was transferred to Chikuni Mission to teach at Canisius Secondary School.

He was a gentle soft-spoken priest, very sincere in dealing with both friends and strangers. If a person's personality can be compared to a sitting room chair, then Lee Kapfer would be a big, warm, comfortable, roomy one with arms wide enough to hold any book and soft enough to support any sleepy head.

His mother's declining health brought him back to Spokane in 1974, where he taught at Gonzaga Prep for the next three years. In 1977 he was appointed the Director of the Jesuit Seminary and Mission Bureau of the Oregon Province in Portland, where he served for twelve years.

Lee was always a warm hearted welcoming person. He was a wonderful companion to have in community. He was often asked and enjoyed giving retreats especially to school children in Zambia. As Mission Superior he frequently welcomed Jesuits from around the Mission to the superior's residence on Senanga Road in Lusaka. Later as Director of the Mission Bureau that same welcoming smile was available for anyone returning from Zambia.

In 1989 he was asked to "fill-in" for one year at St Joseph Church, Seattle and nineteen years later, in 2008, the parish fondly wished him goodbye, as he transferred to the Regis Community assisted-living center in Spokane to pray for the Church and the Society. As his health continued to decline, Lee was transferred to the Jesuit Infirmary in Los Gatos, CA in 2015 where he died.