



Br Patrick McElduff S.J.
(1923-2000. In Zambia 1952-2000)

6 April 2000

Early in his stay at Chikuni, one evening a worker came to Br Pat to report that a snake had fallen into the well, the source of the people's drinking water. 'If it dies, no one will ever drink from the well again' he was told. What to do? Br Pat was nothing if not inventive. Into the 30 foot well he lowered a bag of hay knowing that snakes liked to rest or hide under sacking or straw. Next morning at 04.00 hours, Br Pat was awakened by the worker who said, 'We have killed the snake after hauling up the hay with the snake inside'. Br Pat writing about this incident years later wrote, 'I suppose it's in overcoming challenges that we grow in joy, in closeness to our Creator, and in a knowledge of who we are and how closely we work with Him'. Br Pat was a deeply spiritual man and all his working life was a challenge to him.

He was born on 17 April 1923 in Killeigh, Co Offaly, Ireland, into a farming family. After school he went to the Tullamore Vocational School for Trades Training (carpentry and building) and some academic subjects. He looked upon his early life as 'a good Catholic religious upbringing'. He came to the Society in 1944 to Emo where he stayed after his vows working on the farm - eight years in all. Some years ago, Br Pat sent the Provincial the story of his previous life on one sheet. He mentioned three important elements in his education before he joined the Society: 1. His love and skill in farming from his own family background; 2. His talent for building from his three years at Tullamore technical school; 3. His progress in prayer, for during his years of training, he used to spend much time before the Blessed Sacrament. It was the Lord himself who taught him how to pray.

He came to Northern Rhodesia in 1952 and took charge of the Chikuni farm for six years. For the construction of the Teachers Training College Charles Lwanga across the river from Chikuni, Br Pat was the obvious man for the job together with Fr McCarron, just out from Ireland. During the following eight years, 1964 to 1972, he was on the move around the diocese building churches, schools, teachers' houses and catechists' houses. He spent three years promoting agriculture around Chikuni, went to Kasisi outside Lusaka as farm manager for three years and returned again to Chikuni as farm manager for eleven years. He did a few years' stint at Namwala doing maintenance and pastoral work and then back to Chikuni also on maintenance and assisting in the parish. His health began to trouble him which took him to Ireland. In 1999 he was back in Zambia and was operated on but this did not cure the trouble. In great pain he asked to be brought to Ireland where he died on 6 April 2000.

In all this tremendous work that he did, he never forgot that he was working for God, as he once told a contractor with whom he was working when they had a difference of opinion. He prayed for the people he worked with, took a great interest in his workers and their families. He fed the hungry in famine times, visited the sick, presided at communion services, attended Charismatic prayer groups and generally encouraged people everywhere he went. He was never short of a word of advice or a prayer of encouragement.

He was practical, spiritual, helpful and kind. Ever busy himself, he was always ready to help others. He was well known around the Chikuni area as one to whom people would go when in trouble, knowing they would get a listening ear. This, the local farmers

knew. He was a farmer like themselves and his advice was readily sought.

The people were sad that Br Pat had died abroad. They would have liked to have his body brought back for full traditional burial rites, such was the esteem and love which they had for him. But as the Tonga proverb has it. 'They say goodbye, they say goodbye but they leave their names behind'.