



Fr Frank Keenan, S.J.

(1929-2020. In Zambia: 1957 – 1993)

22 April 2020

Frank Keenan spent 31 years of his Jesuit life in Zambia, three of them as a regent from 1957 to 1960 and the remainder as a priest. This long period in Zambia helped to delineate for him the three major apostolic areas that characterized his life. One was the expertise he developed in ChiTonga, the local language. Frank became very accomplished as a speaker in this language and as a teacher of it. In this, he belonged in the company of the acknowledged experts, people like Frs Moreau, Barney Collins, Joe McCarthy, Bob Kelly, Paddy Joyce, and Frank Wafer. Through the annual language school that he used run at St Kizito's near Monze, Frank enabled countless fellow-Jesuits, Brothers, Sisters and lay-people come to a working knowledge of ChiTonga.

After his ordination in Dublin in 1963, he completed his tertianship at Rathfarnham. He then studied catechetics at Lumen Vitae in Belgium (1965-1966). On his return to Zambia in 1966 he was put in charge of the newly constructed diocesan catechetical training Centre of St Kizito outside Monze, from 1967 to 1976. It was the post Vatican 2 era and catechetics became one of the growing points in the Church's new evangelization program. After a number of years, the diocese had a sufficient number of well-trained catechists and so St Kizito became a pastoral center offering retreats and workshops for Church personnel under the direction of Fr Frank McKeown.

Fr Keenan had a sabbatical at St Louis in the States in 1971 and, on his return, he launched more fully into his third contribution to the diocese – by offering retreats both preached and directed. During his time in Monze, he produced his *Praying with Scripture* – a most useful guide for retreat directors. He spent a number of years in the Novitiate in Lusaka (1980-1984) providing retreats as well as being Vicar General for Religious for the Archdiocese of Lusaka.

He returned to Ireland in 1993 and directed the Mission Office while residing in Gardiner Street and giving retreats. He became well-known as an accomplished and much-in-demand director of the Spiritual Exercises, faithful to the traditions of St

Ignatius and responsive to the needs of his retreatants. He moved full timer into retreat work by taking up residence in St Beuno's in UK where he was part of the staff for eleven years (1996-2007). On coming back to Ireland, he went to Gardiner St and continued his retreat work as well as assisting in the Church and in the financial office of the community. In 2000 he became chaplain of St Monica's Home. He retired to Cherryfield nursing home in 2017 and died there on 22 April 2020.

As a person, Frank was good-humored, blunt and forthright. He was intolerant of anything he regarded as "nonsense" and, in a playful way, seemed to relish the knocking of idols. At times he might shock his listeners with an outlandish statement, but generally this was in order to provoke a response, so that he and they might arrive at a mutually acceptable via media. This vigorous style of communication sometimes gave the impression that Frank was a bit rough, an impression that may have been heightened by the fact that, during his years in Zambia, his closest associates and best friends were also men of very masculine and outspoken dispositions. But these were superficial things. At heart, Frank was a diamond, in his passionate concern that people come to know the Christ of the Spiritual Exercises and in the brilliance of the way he guided people to know Christ more clearly, to love him more dearly and to follow him more nearly. In this he was a true and loyal son of St Ignatius.