



**Fr Norman MacDonald, S.J.**  
**(1926-2005. In Zambia 1951-2005)**

**4 May 2005**

Fr Norman MacDonald was born in Dublin on 26 April 1926. His mother died while he was still a child. However he had stepbrothers, three of whom came to see him while he was in Zambia.

He went to Clongowes Wood College as a young boy and had the nickname of 'Curley Wee', not after the cartoon character but because of his short curly hair at that time. After secondary school, he entered the Jesuits at Emo Park in 1944 and pursued the normal study course of arts and philosophy. He went to the then Northern Rhodesia in 1951 as a scholastic, learned chiTonga and taught for two years in Canisius Secondary School, as well as being involved in brick making.

Returning to Ireland for theology, he was ordained priest at Milltown Park Dublin on 31 July 1953. After tertianship, he returned to Northern Rhodesia and was minister at Chikuni for a year.

Looking at his curriculum, Fr Norman was parish priest or assistant parish priest for over forty years, work he was good at and did well. He first went to Kasiya Parish (1961-1970), then to Mazabuka to Assumption Parish (1970-1976). His longest continuous stint was at Chilalatabo as parish priest from 1976 to 1993 – 17 years. He built a number of small churches at the outstations where he went to say Mass and over a number of years he was part of a team involved in translating the Bible into ChiTonga.

He lived on his own over these years and established a daily routine for himself, everything in its place, an unchanging routine meticulously laid out. He was attached to Mukasa Community in Choma, 60 miles away, and would come in once a week to load up with supplies, arriving at a set time and departing next morning. Before he stopped smoking, it was a lesson in itself to see him prepare and light his pipe in the evening. Everything he did was carefully jotted down, things done and things to be done, in his round copperplate almost childlike handwriting.

He loved the game of rugby, for he was on the school rugby team as a boy, a solid fullback. In fact when he went on leave he opted for the winter months so that he could attend the rugby matches in Ireland. A year spent in Chikuni parish brought him again to Mazabuka, this time to Nakambala parish in 1994.

As he worked there, a day came which was to change his life. In early July he got a stroke, just as he parked his vanette and was getting out of it. He was incapacitated and was brought to John Chula House in Lusaka. His mind and speech were clear. Slowly he began to mend; he got to the stage that, with a walker, he could make his way to the dining room for morning tea. He was brought to Victoria hospital for treatment and there he fell out of bed and broke his shoulder. This really set him back and he seemed worse than when he came in at first. However he began again with physiotherapy and slowly, oh so slowly, he tried to get on his feet again but with little improvement. He was aided to get in and out of bed and at night a minder was there. He complained of stomach trouble, an ulcer he called it and would take antacid tablets before bed. As the stomach pain got worse he was taken to Victoria hospital. Stomach cancer was diagnosed. On the morning he was to be operated on, he asked the nurse to hold his hand, and thus he died on 4 May 2005 at 05.10, a complete surprise!

His brother Paddy came from Australia for the funeral with Mass at Nakambala and afterwards Norman was buried at Chikuni. Fr O'Keeffe gave the homily in chiTonga and Fr

Walsh in English.

During his period at John Chula house, from the time he came until he died, Fr Norman showed extraordinary courage. His sense of humor, his day-to-day acceptance of his condition and his lack of self pity were the fruit of his inner life. A fellow Jesuit described Fr Norman as 'a nice person' in the sense that he had a pleasant disposition and was very pleasant to visit.