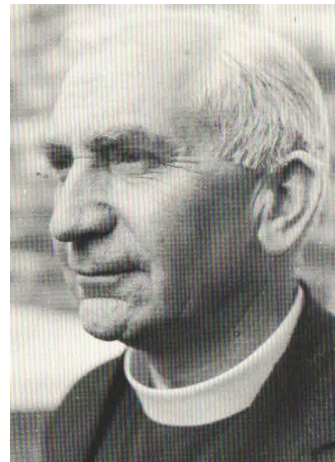


May 12

## Fr DESMOND FORD

22 June 1916 – 12 May 1980

Col Louis Robertson, in charge of the Officers' Training Corps at Stonyhurst when Ford was a boy, noted his 'perfect manners and natural courtesy'. Desmond Ford was born and died in London. He joined the novitiate in 1933 and by 1940 was teaching at Southborne in air-raid shelters by day and fighting fires by night. He developed a keen interest in scouting when he saw how it helped a particular boy and found it an excellent way of reaching out to boys.



Ordained in 1947, he joined the retreat house in Birmingham in 1950 and his time there drew a warm tribute from diocesan priest, Denis Hickling, at the time of Ford's funeral, about his influence on young people, his sense of fun and his friendship. But he was not to stay there long as, in 1953, he was sent to St George's as rector. Robert Althann later remarked on his interest in each boy and his family and the way he wanted them to think of their future in the light of the Spirit. His work led to a growth in vocations. He used to say simply: 'there are two types of people, those who love God and those who don't'.

He extended the buildings, laboratories, boarding area, playing fields and started Hartmann House. The community found him 'rather autocratic' and by 1961 it was time for a change. He was given the task of founding the new college in Chishawasha, St Ignatius. According to William Burridge WF, (now MAfr), it was largely thanks to Fr Ford's insistent efforts that an Enabling Act was passed in 1962 opening up education for Africans. He chose the site, the architects, and



had the plans drawn up and, very quickly – within six months –, the first phase of the school was ready. (The photo shows him with the first students c.1962). Though he had no military background 'there was lot of the army in him'. He was at St Ignatius until 1965 when he was withdrawn to England to set up a Mission Office to support the missions of the then English province. He became part of the provincial team, 1972-79, but again 'not

everyone was happy,' though the three provincials he served were. There was much administration and raising of funds to do and he would even appeal in German in Germany though he did not know the language. He was sensitive to the hardships on the missions and was particularly affected by the deaths at Musami. He had a 'heroic devotion to his work' (Dunphy)

He and Br George Wilde also worked together to advise on improvements to houses in the province though they got the name 'Rack and Ruin'. A Londoner, Ford 'humoured northerners – especially from St Michael's, Leeds - to bring them to better ways', (Rodger Charles) and he would spar with Charles, who was devoted to the Church's Social Teaching, about 'your lot', meaning Prime Minister Harold Wilson and the unions.

Des Ford always had niggling bad health and it eventually caught up with him. He died in his sleep.