



**Fr David A. Skelskey, S.J.
(1938-2020. In Zambia 1988-1991)**

24 June 2020

David was born on 26 January 1938, in Bristol, Connecticut, one of the five children of Andrew and Margaret Skelskey. He began studies at Fairfield University in 1955, but after his freshman year he applied to the New England Province of the Society and entered the novitiate at St Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, New York, since fire had destroyed the New England Province novitiate the previous March.

He took first vows at Saint Andrews but moved to the new Shadowbrook for two years of juniorate studies. In 1960, he was sent to Spring Hill College, in Mobile, Alabama. This was a result of the agreement among the U. S. provincials that scholastics who showed promise in the natural sciences would do philosophy studies there. In 1963-1965 he taught physics at Baghdad College.

From 1965 to 1972 he studied metallurgy and materials science at the University of Pennsylvania, receiving the doctorate in 1972. Then he began theology studies at the Canadian Jesuits' Regis College in the University of Toronto. After two years in Toronto, he moved to Chicago where, over the next six years (1974-1980), he continued—in the Jesuit School of Theology Chicago—the course work needed for his theology degree in Toronto, while he also pursued—at Loyola University Chicago—his research in materials science.

In 1980, two significant events in Fr. Skelskey's life occurred. One was his ordination in June at the College of the Holy Cross. The other was his first visit to Africa, to Tanzania, where he lived with Maryknoll Fathers, while he worked on a project that would devise a simple and inexpensive way of using windmills to bring reliable water to remote areas. In 1984, he returned to Toronto, where he finished work for his theology degree.

In 1985, he went to the Philippines, where for two years he continued his work on windmill technology at the observatory on the campus of the Jesuits' Ateneo de Manila. He wanted to work on windmill technology in Ethiopia but the unsettled nature of the country made it impossible. So from 1988-1991 he worked in the appropriate technology section at KATC in Kasisi with Fr Donal McKenna. He was keen on putting his engineering skills at the service of the rural population. As a result, he gave workshops in appropriate technology and researched cheaper windmills that could be built in a small workshop. Furthermore, he put much energy into completing the construction of Kasisi Rural Clinic and did all the electrical wiring in the clinic, in the nurses' homes and later in the KATC workshop.

He was totally given to helping improve the life of ordinary people through his small scale technology. He was always a dedicated but intense person who had a clear focus to his ministry but was not always easy to work with. He was a bit of a loner but tried hard to live a full Jesuit life. He was not a warm person but was completely given to helping the poor through his technical skills and his wealth of international contacts.

Over the following years his passport must have raised the eyebrow of many a consular official. After he left Zambia, he spent time at the Jesuit Refugee Service in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; at a technical school in another part of Ethiopia where he worked on renewable energy; and, after a sabbatical year at Boston College, three further years in Ethiopia working on the technical aspects of development projects.