



Fr Joseph Keaney, S.J.

(1948-2021. In Zambia 1973-2021)

20 July 2021

Fr Keaney was born to Gerry and Ena (nee Conway) Keaney on 22 December 1948 in Ballyhaunis, in the West of Ireland. He went to the Jesuit St Ignatius College in Galway for his secondary education and immediately afterwards, entered the novitiate in 1966, with his school mate Martin Curry. He was always close to his family, especially his siblings Mary, Chris, Gerry and Hilary who later would visit him on occasion while he was at St Ignatius.

He followed the usual program of training, completing a degree in English and Mathematics at the University College Dublin, followed by philosophy in Milltown Park. He was missioned to Zambia and taught at Canisius Secondary School from 1973 to 1975, while also learning chiTonga. After his theology in Milltown Park he was ordained in 1978. He did a year's course on Missiology at the Mill Hill Institute in London before returning to Zambia in 1979.

His first assignment was in pastoral work in Tonga land - Namwala, Monze diocese from 1979-1981. He developed a kidney condition and returned to Ireland for treatment. He recuperated in his old school of St Ignatius in Galway. He was advised to avoid the rough roads of rural areas and so was assigned to pastoral work in Kitwe (1983-1993). In 1987 he was appointed parish priest of the new parish of Our Lady of Africa and worked energetically to erect the new church. He was very sociable and outgoing and loved to go to all the celebrations in his parish. He himself afterwards freely admitted that he was a friend of Mr Moshi and Johnny Walker. During his stint in Kitwe, he went for his final year of training – tertianship - in the Irish/English program. It was a time of great growth where he began to come to grips with his shadow side and started to cope more positively with his recurring bouts of depression.

When he came to St Ignatius in 1993, he was, in many ways, rejuvenated and more interested in helping others to cope with their problem. Within a few years the parish became more vibrant with greater lay participation and with plenty of opportunities for the youth to pay their part. In Kitwe he felt himself more on the outside of things with the need to construct a new church and losing himself in activity. When he came to St Ignatius, he shifted his energies to helping others to grow through their own experience of life. He spent long hours listening to personal problems and getting to know his parishioners from the inside. During his funeral, which was on-line due to Covid restrictions, many dozens of posts were sent in by the parishioners, thanking God for the priest who listened to them, who was in touch with their problems and who knew a great number of them by name. His liturgies were always lively and full of the joy of the Good News. He often proclaimed the Gospel reading reciting it by heart to make it more personal. In distributing Holy Communion he would use individual names. He was parish priest from 1983 to 2015 during which time he was also the superior of the Jesuit community at St Ignatius (2004-2009). After a sabbatical in Ireland and the States in 2015, he returned as an assistant (2015) but was also acting parish priest from 2016 to 2018. In 2018 he went to Ireland for medical treatment as he developed a serious bone condition (ostereoporosis). Gradually his mobility was restricted and he began to experience a lot of pain in the simplest bodily movements. He returned to St Ignatius using a battery driven wheelchair which enabled him to move freely on the lower floor from his office to his bedroom to the dining room. He became more confined to bed in his last couple of years. He could still continue to help others and people were deeply impressed how he could live with so much pain and discomfort with such patience. Purified by his patience on his bed of pain, he became a pure offering to the Lord who called him to Himself on 20 July 2021.