



Fr Walter O'Connor, S.J.
(1910-1967. In Zambia 1950-1967)

26 July 1967

He was born in 1910 at Waterford, Ireland, into a large family of nine children, son of Peter O'Connor, a local lawyer. Walter's elder brother Eddie had already entered the Society five years before that (1923) and Walter entered the Society in 1928. He was educated by the Christian Brothers and completed his secondary education at Clongowes Wood College. Ordained at Milltown Park in 1942, after tertianship he was appointed minister at Mungret College for a year and again as minister at Rathfarnham, the juniorate. He liked what was described as practical work and he was never short of ideas as to how this, that and the other might best be done – and often opposed by others. Still his cheerfulness remained undiminished. He had a 'stick-to-it-attitude' in the projects he undertook. His zeal and enthusiasm were qualities that stayed with him all his life. While minister at Rathfarnham, he developed an apostolate in the promotion of the family rosary in Dublin. He collected and presented films and other aids for this apostolate.

As a scholastic at Clongowes during regency, he did much to build up the athletics, perhaps inspired by the fact that his father had been an Olympic triple-jump champion. His health was never very strong but his psychic energy was never low. He was passed by the doctors to travel to Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) as one of the nine Irish Jesuits who went there in 1950. As parish priest at Chikuni he entered into the new work with the same spirit that had always characterized him. A very familiar sight was Fr Walter on his heavy motor bike either coming or going on supply. He took a great interest in the condition of the lepers in the area and did much for them. His efforts to establish a leper settlement for them bore fruit after he had left the area. He was a prolific amateur photographer and always recorded the names of those he photograph. His photos were often the ones used by the Mission Office in Dublin for publicity and fund raising in those early years.

Due to ill health, he returned to Ireland for three years during which he did retreat work and lectured about the Mission. This resulted in a number of benefactors who generously supported the work of the mission.

He returned to Zambia in 1960 and moved to Harare (Zimbabwe) to assist the Master of Novices when the joint novitiate was set up. He gave retreats, established the Pioneers at Harare and developed a new apostolate for the consecration of families to the Sacred Heart. He was appointed Director of Vocations for the archdiocese of Harare and traveled a lot with Fr Regis Chigwedere on vocation promotion. Fr Regis paid tribute to Fr Walter at his funeral for his holiness and his work in promoting vocations; his zeal, energy and enthusiasm in everything.

On July 21st 1967 he was operated on at St Anne's Hospital in Harare but when opened up, inoperable cancer was found. He died five days later on the 26 July in the company of his brother, Fr Eddie and fellow Jesuits.

Tributes that came in after the funeral were many and sincere and they could be summed up by what a fellow Jesuit wrote about him, 'He was always full of charity, cheerfulness and on fire with a zeal that consumed him; he was steeped in a spirit of prayer'.