



Fr Bernard Collins, S.J.
(1910-1987. In Zambia 1951-1987)
12 August 1987

Fr Bernard Collins (known to his friends as Barney) was born in the north of Ireland at Laragh, Co Derry. He entered the Society in September 1929. His course of studies was the usual one followed by members of the Irish Province. After the novitiate, a degree at the university in Dublin in humanities and a Higher Diploma in Education, philosophy in Tullabeg, and theology in Milltown Park where he was ordained on 31 July 1943.

At the university he took a classics degree, Latin and Greek, and when he did the Higher Diploma, he got a certificate to enable him to teach through Irish. He went to Rome for a number of years after his tertianship, as an assistant secretary to the English Assistant. He added an extra language to his vocabulary, namely, Italian.

In 1951 he accompanied the first two scholastics, Bob Kelly and Joe Conway, and Br Jim Dunne, on their way to the then Northern Rhodesia. The ship's doctor diagnosed heart trouble in Barney so that he spent most of the voyage immobile in the prone position, including when going through customs. At the Blue Sisters hospital in Cape Town, he was pronounced healthy and free from any heart ailment. It must have been the sea air that cured him as they were at sea for two weeks!

From 1951 to 1960 he was parish priest in Chikuni. It was here that his renowned proficiency in chiTonga showed itself. His earlier linguistic studies stood him in good stead as he composed several booklets. In chiTonga, he produced '*Lusinizyo*', his pamphlet against the Adventists; '*Zyakucumayila*' 61 Sunday sermons for harried missionaries; a Tonga grammar (now used in schools); a short English/Tonga dictionary; a translation of a pamphlet on the Ugandan Martyrs; and '*A Kempis*' which was written but never published. His knowledge of the villages and people of his time is legendary and he was always willing to give of his time to any willing ear that might wish to know the Chikuni people and their relationships. Towards the end of this period in Chikuni, he founded the first Total Abstinence Pioneer Centre.

From 1960 to 1966, he worked in Chivuna as parish priest and Superior and also taught the language to the scholastics, who were delighted with his stories of far off days when they struggled to master the pre-hodiernal past.

Barney moved to Namwala parish from 1968 to 1973 with Fr Clarke, to be joined later by Fr Eddie O'Connor (and his horse). From 1973 to 1977 he was parish priest at Chilalantambo and returned to Chikuni in 1977 to be assistant in the parish to Fr Jim Carroll. He went back to Namwala as superior and parish priest with Fr Piekut as his assistant. The scene changed in 1984 when Fr Frank O'Neill became superior and Barney was the assistant in the parish. This was his status at the time of his death.

During lunch at St Ignatius, Lusaka, on Wednesday 12 August Barney began to show signs of not being well and he died that evening. The funeral took place at Chikuni with 29 priests concelebrating. Fr Dominic Nchete, the principal celebrant, paid tribute to the long years that Fr Collins had mingled closely with the Tonga people.

Fr Collins, a very unassuming man, had a deep knowledge of the Tonga people and was truly an incarnation of becoming all things to all people. With his fluency in chiTonga, it was a delight to listen to him preach which he did in the grand manner. He had a sympathy and understanding of the mentality and customs of the Tonga that few from overseas have achieved.