

16 August



Br Paul Desmarais, SJ
(1945-2023; in Zambia 1971-2022)

16 August 2023

He was 78 years old and in his 60th year in the Society of Jesus,
51 of those were in Zambia.

Ort.09 Mar 1945
Loc. Nat. Windsor, ON, Canada
Ingr. 18 Mar 1964
Loc. Ingr. Guelph, ON, Canada

Tertiaship. ..Guelph, ON, Canada
Grad.FF *Dies.*02 Feb 1986
Loc. Grad. ...Kasisi, Lusaka, Zambia
Trans.CDA → ZAM on 14 Jul 1998

Defunc.16 Aug 2023
Loc. Defunc. Pickering, ON, Canada
Prov:SAP

Paul Desmarais was born on 9 March 1945 in Windsor, Canada of a farming family. He went to Tilbury District High School from 1958-1963. Immediately afterwards, in 1964, he entered the novitiate in Guelph and, during his juniorate, took a BSc in Agriculture at Guelph University (1967-1971).

On arrival in Zambia in 1971, the Provincial asked him to help the local farmers around Kasisi. He planned a two year residence course for ten families and spent the first few years clearing the land and putting up the necessary houses, with financial support from Misereor. He ploughed a lonely furrow in those early years with little support from his companions, but his courageous tenacity, bordering on stubbornness, saw him through. The foundations for the Kasisi Agriculture Training Center were well laid.

He was greatly helped by those who joined him. Br Pat McElduff (1975-1978) was an experienced farmer and builder. Later Fr Donal McKenna (1982-1990) spent some years setting up a workshop in appropriate technology which produced various items needed by a small farmer – a foot operated water pump, a wooden scotch cart, solar cooker etc.

Finally, Fr Roland Lesseps (1990-2009) spent long years there with his great skill and knowledge in agroforestry. With Paul he helped launch KATC into the new area of organic farming.

In 1983 the Alumni Association of his *alma mater*, Guelph University, decorated him as the outstanding past student for that year. In 1985 the biogas project was launched with reports in the national papers.

In the early 1990's the KATC launched into organic farming, showing how to develop a sustainable farm replacing fertilizers and insecticides with nature's own products. International funding was available to help the farmers of the Chongwe area, not only to survive, but also to prosper in developing a natural way to produce the commodities that are now available in the shops like honey, moringa, flowers etc. as well as the staple crops of maize, soya beans, etc. Much work was done in choosing and developing better species of the crops used. At the memorial service for Paul at Kasisi, 18 August 2023, several leaders of Government, Agricultural officials, and farming organizations, highlighted the impact that KATC has had on the farmers of the Chongwe area, whose products continue to feed the surrounding urban population.

Br Paul was a pleasant person with a great sense of humor which belied his deep faith and unwavering commitment to serve the poor and the marginalized. His love for the poor and the earth made him a passionate advocate for ecological justice. As he often said: "Social justice has to include justice for the environment." His decades of organic farming led him to a greater ecological insight into the goodness of God. He saw in organic farming, not only a great respect for the gift of nature, but above all a way to help the ordinary small farmer to work for a better life.

He continued to be the Director of KATC up to 2020 when he took a back seat and saw the center continue to prosper and become increasingly more self-supporting. In 2022 he returned to Canada for treatment for a suspected brain tumor. He continued in good spirits despite increasing diminishment and finally he returned to his beloved Creator on 16 August 2023.