



Fr Paul Cullen, S.J.
(1936-1997. In Zambia 1962-1981)

16 September 1997

A familiar picture of Fr Paul (known as Cu) was of him rubbing the palm of one hand against the back of the other with a skittish laugh.

He was born in Clonmel in Co Tipperary on in 1936, attended the Christian Brothers there for school and then entered the Jesuit novitiate at Emo Park in 1954. After his degree at University College Dublin and philosophy in Tullabeg, Paul came to Zambia in 1962. This involved, first of all, giving time to learn chiTonga and then teaching in Canisius Secondary school accompanied by the many chores which scholastics had to do when in a teaching job. He enjoyed these three years with his fellow scholastics, for Paul was essentially person-oriented.

Paul returned to Ireland to study theology at Milltown Park in Dublin and was ordained priest there in 1968. Prior to returning to Zambia, he asked to do a course in London (teaching English to foreign students) and a counseling course in the USA, which he believed would be of help to him when he came back whether he was assigned to teach or to work in a parish.

He returned to Zambia in 1969 and went to teach in Canisius for a short time then to Fumbo mission in the valley (which he found extremely difficult) and then back to Canisius. As a priest he wanted to help people. For him people were more important than any issues. Just teaching in a school with a little prefecting was not his idea of priestly work. To counsel schoolboys at a deeper level, he found that the differences in cultural background interfered and were a block. In Fumbo parish he discovered that the type of life there was not for him: the language barrier, cultural differences, loneliness and a certain anxiety in his character, all militated against a fruitful sojourn in the valley.

He left the mission and returned to Ireland in 1972. From then to his death in 1997, twenty five years were spent in parish work in a number of Dublin parishes, Walkinstown, Bonnybrook, Ballymun, and finally in Gardiner Street where he was curate from 1985 to 1991 and then parish priest from 1991 to his death. His priesthood was expressed in his care for people. Working in a parish gave him great scope for this. Always with a thought for others, he had a sensitivity for the concerns of those with different opinions and any differences he had with people were always expressed with an apology.

When a sabbatical year was the in-thing in the eighties, Paul's thoughts turned to Zambia not the USA or Canada, as he wrote to the Provincial there. "I would like a chance to visit old places with the Holy Spirit. I believe it would be good for me personally. However I would also like to help in a genuine way". This offer was accepted in Zambia, but the actual going never materialized.

Paul had a sense of fun and a hearty laugh. He liked to be with people with whom he related. A contemporary of his wrote, "There were great depths of kindness, sympathy, generosity and love in him, which even longed for a fuller expression. He needed his own freedom and the assurance of encouraging affirmation, something Paul did not always experience. He was basically a pastor, sympathizing with strange waywardness while kindly suggesting a way forward, or dealing jovially with people". He passed away on 16 September 1997 in the Jesuit nursing home, after battling with a brain tumor for some time.