



**Fr James McPolin, S.J.**  
**(1931-2005. In Malawi 1996-1999)**

**9 October 2005**

James McPolin was born in Limerick and educated at the Jesuit Crescent College. In 1948 he entered the Society at Emo and followed the normal course of studies of the Irish province. After a year's theological studies at Milltown Institute, he transferred to Frankfurt for his final years of theology.

Jimmy, as a scholastic, always gave the impression of youth and energy. He was deeply interested in sports of all kinds and persuaded those of us studying philosophy with him to build, a basketball court on which he tutored the ignorant among us in the rules of the game. He sailed through his Jesuit studies effortlessly and we were not surprised when he was sent to the Biblical Institute in Rome for a Doctorate. Thus he lectured in Scripture for 23 years at the Milltown Institute, Dublin, alternating semesters for 3 years with the Biblicum in Rome. Subsequently he also taught scripture at Gonzaga University, Spokane, at the University of Central America (UCA, El Salvador) and at St Peter's Seminary in Zomba, Malawi. His textbook on St. John's Gospel is still very popular with students of scripture.

He was elected as the representative of the Irish Province for the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Jesuits in Rome in 1975 and was deeply involved in drafting the document of that Congregation on the formation of our young men. He acted as the Irish Provincial's delegate for formation for many years.

After serving as Dean of the Theology Faculty at Milltown Institute for four years, he was appointed as President of the Institute. During this time he was transferred to a small community of scholastics living in poor quarters in the center of the city. During his seven years in that community he showed great concern for the difficulties of the poorer neighbors. His cycling to work every day to at Milltown, 6 km away, surprised many of his academic colleagues at the Institute.

In 1989 he moved to San Salvador in Central America where he worked as assistant priest in the Jesuit Parish, eventually becoming the Parish Priest. When he first arrived in San Salvador, he was invited to visit the University community for a meal and spend the night with them because of the curfew. In fact there was some urgent business in the parish which prevented him from accepting the invitation. That was the night in which the six Jesuits in the University community, together with their housekeep and her daughter, were murdered by the army. Jimmy thus narrowly escaped sharing their fate.

On his return from San Salvador in 1996, he joined the small group of Jesuits who were teaching at St. Peter's Seminary at Zomba, Malawi. He first studied the local chiChewa language and then settled into teaching scripture for five semesters.

He had a very good relationship with the Malawian seminarians: he always greeted his class with the word "Wawa" which is a term of great respect in Chewa and which invariably elicited a loud response. He set himself up as coach of the football team and could be seen at half-time surrounded by a ring of players whom he harangued in a good natured way. He also endeared himself to the teaching staff by the jokingly provocative way he would express some outrageous opinion during meals at our 'round table' which would immediately spark a lively discussion.

When he returned to Ireland he joined the Belfast community for a year and contributed to their efforts in the reconciliation between opposing factions in Northern Ireland. This was followed by a year's sabbatical at Cambridge, Mass. and then by three years in the parish at Venice, California where his fluency in Spanish was appreciated by the many Hispanic parishioners.

A series of strokes starting in 2004 forced his return to the Irish nursing unit at Cherryfield and he died there on 9 October 2005.