



Fr David J Norris

(1940-2020. In Zambia 1970-1997)

31 October 2020

Father David Norris died on 31 October 2020 at Rene Goupil House, Pickering, Ontario. He was in his 80th year of life and had been a Jesuit for 61 years. He was born in Kingston, Ontario, the son of John Norris and Jean Kettle. After four years at Regiopolis College in Kingston (which was still administered by the Jesuits), Dave entered the Society at Guelph on 14 August 1959. After first vows he began the usual two-year juniorate, then journeyed to Mount St Michael in Spokane for philosophy. In 1966 he returned to Kingston for a year of regency at Regiopolis. He was to continue regency in Newfoundland, but he became ill there and recuperated in Toronto for nearly a year.

Dave was keen on being a missionary to Zambia and spent a year in Zambia teaching at Mpima Minor Seminary in Kabwe before returning to Canada in 1970 for theology at Regis College, Willowdale. He was ordained on 16 February 1974. Later that year he returned to Zambia and for the next ten years served in various mission stations, involved in pastoral ministry, especially working with Christian Life school groups and giving retreats to school groups. He did some teaching, primarily religious education. Since he loved basketball he coached a few secondary school teams. One famous match for the Lusaka City Championship was when his team, Kabulonga Boys Secondary, was pitted against Kamwala Boys coached by his fellow Jesuit and community member, Peter Titland. The tension was not only felt on the court, but also in the community during the week preceding the game.

In 1985 he had to leave Africa due to serious illness and was applied to the Canadian Jesuit Mission office while recuperating. He moved to Northern Ontario, serving two years at Anishinabe Spiritual Centre in Espanola. By 1988 Dave was well enough to return to Africa and for the next nine years taught in Canisius Secondary School. He developed many friendships during this second decade on the missions. During this time, he even managed a long visit to his fellow missionaries in Darjeeling, India.

In 1997 Dave returned to Canada and was assigned to the infirmary at Pickering, as he was in need of regular medical attention. There he did house ministry and conducted retreats at Manresa Retreat House. He moved into La Storta House in 2007 and began pastoral ministry in the Durham area, including a regular celebration of Sunday Mass at Ontario Shores Hospital and chaplaincy at various Catholic schools. With his broad smile, his guitar and his casual manner, he was different from the usual school chaplain and was quite popular with the students. He took regular breaks to serve for months at a time in Northern Ontario, which proved a blessing for his wandering spirit. In 2019 (just before the Covid pandemic hit) he moved back into Rene Goupil House, to receive ongoing medical supervision: he had suffered a severe concussion one summer in Thunder Bay and never recovered fully. There were periods he suffered confusion and was subject to falls, which proved rather debilitating.

He had a great pastoral zeal and it was disheartening for him to give up driving, which limited his outside ministry. Whenever he celebrated a community Mass, he brought along his guitar, and there was much singing, more or less on key, even as his congregation scrambled to remember his eclectic choice of hymns. During this period, he made a couple of farewell trips to Zambia which consoled him greatly.