



Br James Dunne, S.J.

(1921 – 2014. In Zambia 1951-1974)

7 November 2014

On 7 November 2014, Brother Jim Dunne died at Cherryfield Lodge in Dublin. Jim was born on 22 May 1921 in Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath. Always a man of few words, Jim became more quiet-spoken as the years advanced. But underneath this quiet exterior lay a deeply spiritual man whose longings and desires were always for the Lord and how he could use his talents to make the love and service of Christ our Lord a reality in his own life, as well as in the lives of his fellow-Jesuits and the many individuals whom he encountered during his years with us.

From the very beginning of his religious life, Jim was a rock-solid man of God. Very early witness to this was the trust that the Irish Provincial placed in him by sending him in his second year as a novice to Northern Rhodesia, to what was then a newly developing world for Irish Jesuits. Jim was just over 30 at the time, mature in years but still grappling with the beginnings of the religious life. He arrived in Chikuni early in September 1951, and during the months of learning chiTonga in the somewhat spartan conditions that then prevailed

Endowed with great practical intelligence, Jim brought into the Society a wide range of skills developed and exercised in the family's workshop not far from Tullamore. Construction, brick-laying, carpentry, joinery, plumbing, electrical work – he took all of these in his stride and yet he was always prepared to learn more from those who were more qualified than he was. Jim was also a very gifted manager with a flair for organising and getting things done. His ability to give directions simply and effectively, and his own manifest skills, helped greatly in building up confident teams of proficient and well-motivated building workers. Jim became key to building-development in what was to become the Diocese of Monze. But in addition to the buildings that bear his stamp, Jim also made an impact in the skills that he passed on to the local people with whom he worked. He was very particular that anything he turned his hand to should be of the highest quality and he always tried to make sure that his trainees and workers would also be concerned not just with getting a job done but with getting it done to the highest possible standards.

One of Jim's earliest assignments was to develop and run the Chivuna Trades Training Institute. In time, it gave way to a secondary school for girls, but not before, under Jim, it had qualified several hundred good carpenters and brick-layers who fanned out to bring building development across much of the Southern Province. Later, when the Diocese of Monze was established, Jim became in effect its building manager, working in the development of Kizito Catechetical Centre, churches, parish houses, schools, and houses for teachers and catechists.

Jim was a very agreeable companion, one who was easy and enjoyable to live with. He was quiet in his manner but this did not stop him enjoying a game of cards, a good movie or the comradeship of a walk in the evening with one of the community. He was greatly loved by the Batonga people among whom he worked and is particularly remembered for the concern he showed that their marriages be happy and stable and that their children attend school. He showed special kindness and understanding towards Jesuit scholastics newly arrived in the country presenting a hat until acclimatised to the sun.

Ironically, it was malaria that brought Jim's years in Zambia to a close. He contracted fever in days long before artemesin or other drugs could provide powerful protection. Though frequently quite unwell, he continued with his work as best he could, but in time developed a recurrent form of malaria that was intractable to treatment. He returned permanently to Ireland in 1974. So it was that after 23 years in Zambia, from 1951 to 1974, Jim returned to Ireland and was integrated into the Province ministry.

His organizing skills made him an obvious choice as minister in Belvedere College (1974-1981); Gardiner Street (1983-1985); Tullabeg (1985-1987). He picked up related administrative jobs as secretary in CIR (1981-1984); treasurer at Milltown (1988-1995); assistant in the Church at Gardiner Street (1995-1999); and finally assisting in the large Milltown community (1999-2007).

He continued to show the qualities that had marked him in Zambia: always a hard worker; practical and resourceful; quiet and peaceable; a delightful man in a community; a wonderful man to have on your side; always concerned about those around him; ever seeking perfection in anything undertaken by him or any of those for whom he was responsible; and always, simply always, a solid man of God, devoted and faithful to his religious duties, serving the God he loved through what he could still do, building up others through his sympathetic and understanding nature, and being a great witness to the Lord and to Jesuit life through being just himself, a great Jesuit Brother.