



**Fr Jeremiah O'Connell, S.J.**

**(1937-2020. In Zambia 1963-2020)**

**17 November 2020**

Fr Jeremiah O'Connell (called Jerry) was born to Dr John O'Connell and Norah Howard on 2 July 1937 in Mallow, Co Cork, Ireland. He had a brother and two sisters, one of whom, Jennie, later became a Loreto Sister.

After secondary school in the Jesuit Clongowes College, he entered the novitiate in 1955. He studied Science at the University in Dublin (1957-1960) and did his philosophical studies in Ireland (1961-1962) and in Spain (1963). He requested to be sent on the missions and so in 1963 he arrived in Zambia and studied chiTonga and taught in Canisius College for a year. As he wanted to get a Higher Diploma in Education, he taught for a year in Belvedere College in Dublin while doing so. From there he went for his theology to Milltown Park (1966-1970) and was ordained in 1969.

He returned in 1971 to teach in Canisius and was the headmaster there for a short time (1972-1973). After his tertianship in the US in 1973, he taught for a year at Mpima Minor Seminary in Kabwe, and then was missioned to Mukasa Minor Seminary, in Choma for the next 11 years (1975-1986), becoming headmaster in 1976. After a sabbatical in which he did a Clinical Pastoral Care program in the US, he was teaching again at Canisius from 1988-1991.

In 1991 came a decisive break from schoolwork to pastoral ministry when he became chaplain at University Teaching Hospital, Lusaka for 8 years. It set the pattern for the rest of his life. He was superior at St Ignatius (1992-1998) and afterwards was transferred to Chikuni as rector (1988-2004) with some teaching. He was again headmaster at Mukasa for a short time (2005-2007) before handing over the management of the school to the diocese. He took up again his chaplaincy work at UTH (2008-2016), while living at Luwisha House. His legs began to cause him problems, so he moved as chaplain to the smaller and more adjacent hospital of Levy Mwanawasa. Seeing the bent figure of Jerry in his later years, one would be surprised to know that throughout his life he had been a physically active person. In his early years, he excelled in tennis and, because of his skill in placing the ball out of reach of his opponent in the tramlines, he became known to his companions as 'Tramline Jerry'.

Jerry saw his life as twofold: his life as a Jesuit and his life as a missionary. Commitment and dedication were the characteristic features of his life, for he was always faithful and loyal in whatever tasks he was given. Fulfilling one's duty in a responsible and conscientious manner was very important for him. He threw himself completely into carrying out his tasks. He always sought to do what was right and he would not be deterred from doing what he believed was the right thing to do. As a result, some found him to be somewhat rigid in his behavior. He believed in punctuality, a gift which, to his annoyance, he did not always find in others. Despite his matter-of-fact and cut-and-dried manner, Jerry was a humble and unassuming person. While he appreciated acknowledgement and praise for what he was doing, he never sought public acclaim. To those who knew him well, he was a sensitive and caring person, warm-hearted, kind and considerate. A seminarian working in the chaplaincy at UTH said: "He was well known and loved by us seminarians and the entire staff at the chaplaincy. He had such inspirational homilies. He gave an inspiring witness of his love for God and for self-sacrificing service in his role as chaplain."

He went for overseas treatment but after a serious fall, treatment was terminated. He wanted to spend his last days in Zambia and so returned to Chula House, the retirement home, in 2019 from where he passed away peacefully on 17 November 2020.