



Bishop James Corboy, S.J.
(1916-2004. In Zambia 1962-1996)

24 November 2004

The diocese of Monze was set up on 10 March 1962, an offshoot of the Archdiocese of Lusaka. Fr James Corboy, at that time a professor of theology in Milltown Park, Dublin, Ireland, was appointed to be the first bishop of the new diocese. This new diocese was three-quarters the size of his own country of Ireland. It had a population of a million people, 16% of whom were Catholic. At that time there were 8 mission stations centered round Chikuni. It was a daunting task for the new bishop.

Bishop James was born in Caharconlish, Co Limerick, Ireland in 1916. He was the son of a country doctor who lived on a small farm. There he grew up appreciating nature and farming. He attended Jesuit schools and entered the Jesuits in 1935, followed the Jesuit course of studies, arts, philosophy, regency and theology being ordained priest at Milltown Park on 28th July 1948. After tertianship, he went to the Gregorian University for a doctorate in Ecclesiology. Later as bishop, he attended the Vatican Council and really became interested in theology, something that he continued to do passionately throughout his life.

He returned to Milltown Park to lecture and also take charge of the large garden. He always loved pottering around in the garden of any house he lived in. He became rector there in 1960.

At the age of 46, he found himself appointed to be the Bishop of a newly set up diocese of Monze in Zambia, where the Jesuits had been working since 1905. So on 24 June he was consecrated bishop in Zambia. For 30 years he was the bishop of Monze. The task before him, as he saw it, was fourfold: development, pastoral work, health and education. He invited a number of congregations to help him in this task. Monze hospital was set up and run by the Holy Rosary Sisters. The Sisters of Charity and the Handmaids were already in the diocese. Presentation Sisters, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Sisters of Charity of Milan and others entered into pastoral work, and the teaching and healing ministry. The Spiritans, Christian Brothers and John of God Brothers were the chief male religious groups who came to help in various fields.

As early as four years after becoming bishop, he put into effect a project after his own heart – promoting vocations from the people themselves. So in 1966, he built Mukasa, a minor seminary in Choma, to foster and encourage young boys who showed an interest in the priesthood. Boys came here not only from the diocese of Monze but also from, Livingstone, Lusaka and Solwezi. Over 50 Mukasa boys have been ordained priests and several are studying in the major seminaries.

Another project very close to his heart was the establishment of a local congregation of sisters – Sisters of the Holy Spirit – in 1971. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary helped out in this venture. These local Sisters are involved in teaching, pastoral work, nursing and formation work among their own people. The last eight years of his life Bishop James spent in Ireland on medical advice. Whenever anyone visited him from Zambia, His first question to anyone visited him from Zambia invariably was: "How are the Holy Spirit Sisters"?

He regularized the eight mission stations as parishes and set up 13 more parishes. Development was another project close to his heart. With the help of Fr Fred Moriarty S J, Monze became the leading diocese in the country in promoting development

People found Bishop Corboy approachable, kind, caring and simple. He spoke simply

(deceptively so, some said). He could explain himself in quite simple language, understood by all. He had to learn chiTonga in which he had a passable skill and even that was spoken simply but correctly. He was unassuming. Often in a crowd, one would often ask 'which is the Bishop?' He loved to pray the Rosary. He was a very shy man and avoided large social gatherings when he could. Inevitably after doing a confirmation he would say, 'Gosh, I'd love to stay for the celebrations, but I have some important business to get back to in Monze'.

On 24 October 1991 he was called to State House to receive the decoration of Grand Commander of the Order of Distinguished Service for his work in the Monze Diocese.

He retired as Bishop in 1992, worked for four years at St Ignatius in Lusaka before returning to Ireland because of his blood pressure. A short time before he died in St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, his nephew, Dr John Sheehan, was with him and thought the Bishop looked distressed and asked if he was in pain. Bishop James replied. "No. God bless *you*, and good bye"! He died on 24 November 2004, aged 88 years.