



Fr William Loyens, S.J.
(1926-2004. In Zambia 1993-1998, 2000)

8 December 2004

William Loyens was christened Guillaume but later under Flemish influence the name was reduced to Lom. He was born the eldest of ten siblings on 22 December 1926 in Vlijtingen, near Limburg, in the east of Belgium. He attended the Jesuit-run apostolic school of St Joseph in Turnhout completing the six year program in four. He was greatly inspired by the Jesuits he met and felt strongly attracted to the foreign missions. So when he entered the Society in 1947 it was the Oregon Province of USA that he joined, with a view to going to the Alaska Mission. He completed his novitiate in Drogen (Tronchiennes), Belgium and then went to the United States in 1949. He spent a short time in the Sheridan novitiate, Oregon and then began his philosophy in Mount St Michael (Spokane) (1950-1953).

He was missioned to Holy Cross Mission in the lower Yukon River (Alaska), to start a high school with Sr George Edmond. He taught every subject and helped launch the project for which he was 'the spark plug'. He spent 1955-1959 at Alma College near Los Gatos, California, doing theology. He became an American citizen in 1956 and two years later was ordained in 1958. As happened during his philosophical studies, the staff wanted him to join them and take a doctorate in theology. However after a long discussion, he pointed out that the purpose of his coming from Belgium was to join the Alaska Mission. He completed his course with tertianship at Drogen, Belgium.

He taught in Fairbanks (Alaska) at Monroe Catholic School (1960-62) while working during the summer for a Masters in Education. He then went for anthropological studies to the University of Fairbanks (1962-1963) finishing off his doctorate in the University of Wisconsin (1963-1966). He spent four summers doing field work among the Koyukon Athabaskan Indians living along the Yukon River

His real interest all his life was in teaching and so he was tenured at the University of Alaska (1966-74) and during some of his later years he headed the department. He was such a successful teacher and great inspiration to many students, that in 1984 his painted portrait was added to the unofficial Fairbanks Hall of Fame with 24 other luminaries.

In 1973 he had to leave the university to take up a new role as superior of the Alaska Mission which was further prolonged in 1976 when he was appointed provincial of Oregon. His openness and outgoing character was greatly appreciated by all the Jesuits, especially during the turmoil in the Church and the Society of Jesus in the post-Vatican Council years.

However in 1979, before the end of his term of office, he had his first encounter with leukemia. He took time off, returned to Belgium for a while and, with the help of chemotherapy, made a remarkable recovery.

In 1980 he returned to Fairbanks to become deeply involved for ten years with adult education where his lectures were recorded and widely distributed. In 1990 he became more involved in pastoral ministry in the Immaculate Conception Parish.

His old love of teaching surfaced again and in 1993 he volunteered to teach with a group of fellow Jesuits at St Peter's Major Seminary at Zomba (Malawi). Before leaving Fairbanks he was honored publically by the Mayor for 'his commitment and dedication to his fellowman...(and for being) the epitome of unselfishness'. He taught at St Peter's until 1998 when he had a relapse and spent two years back in the USA. He returned again in 2000 but remained only a few months before the disease came on again and he returned home permanently. He passed away on 8 December 2004.