



**Fr. Francis Woda, S.J.**

**(1926-2016; in Zambia/Malawi 1955-2016)**

**19 December 2016**

Francis (Frank) Woda was born on 28 February 1926 in Mokrzyńska, Poland, the eldest of three children of Franciszek Woda and Salomea Filipowska. He did his primary school in his village and began secondary school in a nearby town. However, in 1939 the Germans invaded Poland and forbade secondary education for Poles. Later he was taken by the German army and transported to Germany to work on a farm.

Although it was difficult leaving his own family, he was fortunate to be placed on a farm of a good Catholic family. They treated him as a member of the family, inviting him always to share their meals with them. When the Gestapo found out that they were not treating him as a worker, they forbade the family to have him at table with them in the same room. The husband then set up a small table for Frank in the doorway of the room, leading to the dining room, so that he obeyed the Gestapo but also so that Frank would share their food and conversation. Frank was grateful to the family all his life and came to know the Providence of God in his life.

After the war, Frank completed his secondary school in 1948 in Lippstadt, Germany under the auspices of the United Nations. A chaplain, whom he had met, took him to meet some Jesuits in Hanover. He was attracted to them. He applied to the Jesuits and his application was processed in Rome, where he went in 1950 and entered the novitiate for the Southern Polish province. On completing the novitiate he began his studies of philosophy at the Gregorian University, completing in 1955.

He then was sent to the Lusaka Mission for his regency. He learned chiNyanja in Katondwe, while he looked after the garden. Later he was sent to Kasisi Boys' primary school where he taught mathematics and general science.

In 1957 he was sent to Ireland to do a science degree at UCD (University College Dublin). Upon completing his BSc in 1960, he continued studying to obtain a Higher Diploma in Education while teaching at Belvedere College in Dublin. In 1962 he began his theological studies at Milltown Park and was ordained in 1965. Frank also took out Irish citizenship during his lengthy stay in Ireland.

After his fourth year of theology, he returned to the Lusaka Mission, in the newly independent Zambia. For two years, he did pastoral work in Karenda, Mumbwa and finally Chelston. In 1968 he was assigned to Mpima Minor Seminary in Kabwe to teach science. Here he began his long, successful career as a secondary school science teacher.

When the minor seminary at Mpima was closed in 1974, to make way for the major seminary, Frank moved to Canisius Secondary School in Chikuni. For the next 25 years he taught the physical sciences, mostly to the senior students. From 1988 to 2000, he also served as the school bursar, computerizing the accounts during this time. He was a meticulous science teacher; clear, demanding and up to date. It was his metier, his chosen craft, and he loved it. He taught his students to be disciplined and exact. His students found him a tough teacher but the torrent of affection on the internet gives their final verdict.

In 2002 he moved to Mukasa Minor Seminary in Choma, once again displaying his excellence as a science teacher. He remained there until 2009 when the diocese took over the management of the seminary from the Jesuits. He returned to Canisius in 2010 continuing his teaching of physics until 2013, at the age of 87, when he finally retired.

During those years, he was three times in Dublin for lengthy periods recovering his health. When he returned to Zambia in 2014, he was missioned to Chula House to translate Polish documents in the archives and to pray for the Church and the Society. He died unexpectedly while getting dressed on 19 December 2016.

Among his many qualities, a couple stand out. He was a prayerful person. He was also a Jesuit who found God in all things. He was interested in everything. He collected seeds, cuttings, plants and trees and nurtured them to grow. The only programmes on television he watched were the news channels and the National Geographic channel. He was devoted to science, particularly physics, and became interested in electronics and computers. He constantly downloaded items he found interesting from the Internet (much to the chagrin of his community members who found the monthly allotment of data bundles used up within a few days). A final quality that characterized Frank's life was his determination and perseverance. Pursuing a vocation that led him from Germany to Rome to Zambia, required a trust and confidence in God, but also his own determined response to the call. Of course the negative side of determination is stubbornness. Frank could be very stubborn at times if he was convinced he was right. He tended to doctor himself, regardless of what the real doctor recommended. But that determination or stubbornness and perseverance helped him to live happily for ninety years sometimes in very difficult situations.