

NEW MODELS OF SOLIDARITY

— Leonard Chiti SJ

It gives me immense pleasure to speak at this important occasion marking eighty years of IJI's mission in modern-day Zambia.

IJI started off as the Jesuit Mission Office to support Jesuit missionaries around the world but has now expanded into a global development and funding agency. I should like to express my personal gratitude, but also that of the entire Province of Southern Africa, for the immense contribution that IJI has made to the development efforts in Zambia and Malawi, formerly known as Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland respectively.

Again, without going into any details, I want to single out the establishment of a new diocese in Southern Zambia, Monze; the growth of a Jesuit Province from Chikuni Mission into a Vice Province, and then the Province of Zambia and Malawi (ZAM) and now the newly formed and united greater Province of Southern Africa (SAP), which now has many more responsibilities beyond just Zambia and Malawi.

On a personal note, I am deeply indebted to the Irish Jesuits who introduced me to the Society of Jesus, and to the graces of the Spiritual Exercises.



Bio: Leonard Chiti SJ is the Provincial of the Jesuit Southern Africa Province – which covers 9 countries. This follows his role as Provincial for the Zambia Malawi Province. Prior to his two Provincial roles, Leonard was a SCIAF (Caritas Scotland) Committee Member, the Coordinator of GIAN (the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network) and also the Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). In his latter role at JCTR, Leonard became quite adept with Irish Aid and Misesan Cara, overseeing Misesan Cara grants which advocated for a Bill on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to be passed into law in Zambia. Leonard did his tertianship in Ireland at Manresa Retreat Centre and taught at Clongowes College.

Colm O’Riordan SJ was one of the first Jesuits to arrive in Northern Rhodesia in the late 1950s and was the first Jesuit I met when I was preparing to go to college and needed a retreat to prepare myself.

Des O’Brien SJ was like a father-figure to me when I was involved in youth programmes at college; and **John Dooley SJ** introduced me to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, in particular the Principle and Foundation, which remains a key meditation in my life even up to today.

Jerry O’Connell SJ is the one who actually helped me make up my mind about the joining the Jesuits, whilst **Michael J Kelly SJ** was a source of personal inspiration throughout the many years I knew him, both as a lecturer at the University of Zambia, and as a companion in community; and finally **Joe Dargan SJ** who was my tertian master right here at Manresa retreat house in Dublin.

John Guiney SJ and **Murt Curry SJ** held my hand when I assumed the role of Director at the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) by linking the JCTR to *Misean Cara*, who provided the much-needed financial support to grow the centre and enabled it to play a significant role in the development of Zambia. Finally, **Leonard Moloney SJ** journeyed with me as a fellow major superior, as we were both appointed in the same year. So, you can see the ties between us run deep.

As I look back over the last 80 years, it strikes me that one could characterise that time as a time when missions were opened (schools, parishes, retreat centres, development projects, etc), when missionaries arrived from Ireland to work selflessly. It was a time of new missions, new men and money – three key ingredients to successful evangelisation and development. 80 years later, however, the last Irishman to travel to Zambia arrived some twenty years ago – **Declan Murray SJ** – and has since returned to Ireland. The youngest Irish Jesuit in Zambia now is 79 years old.



Clive Dillon-Malone SJ, Irish Jesuit on mission & former Lecturer at the University of Zambia and Rosaleen Kenny, IJI Receptionist

But local men, well-formed by the Irish Jesuit missionaries, have since assumed the role played by these missionaries. But whilst we now have our own men, we still need your help with those other two ingredients.

It also strikes me that the relationship between the Irish Province and the former Chikuni Mission, which gave way to the Zambia-Malawi province, and now the Province of Southern Africa (SAP) was always asymmetrical.

Everything, including men, was coming from Europe and little, if any, was coming from Africa or the mission lands for that matter.

There were gaps that needed filling, and indeed the Irish missionaries successfully met those needs. We are grateful for everything that has been done, but times have changed, and this brings me to the topic of today. But this is not a one-sided appeal. I want to say that we want to be able to help ourselves, and we can help you



Caption: Colm Brophy, Former ZAM Jesuit Provincial, Mary Carroll, Former Volunteer teacher in Zambia and Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications & Research Officer

with what we have. In terms of vocations and men, we can offer ourselves. But we still need your help in constructing – and I would add, finally endowing local works – so that they can continue.

There will be new pathways of solidarity: strengthening and enhancing partnership between the Global North and South. Let me speak about these existing and new pathways I envisage.

Firstly, just a few weeks ago the college of cardinals elected the second Non-European Pope following the death of Pope Francis from Argentina. Our own superior general is a Venezuelan citizen. Quite a few Jesuits, and if I may add, other congregations as well, have their religious taking important responsibilities in the governance of church at global level from outside of Europe.

I just wonder whether a time will come when men and women from the South would be welcomed to come to Ireland to continue the work. I understand attendance at religious services has fallen and vocations are few here. Are we likely in the not-too-distant future to see a reverse movement of men and women, similar to what happened after the Second World War?

In light of us being in the midst of a jubilee year of hope, I think a meeting like we have just had evokes hope in me that our long and valued partnership will not end with the end of Irish Jesuits coming to my part of the world, but that this meeting and other initiatives will help us to turn a new page/chapter in our relationship.

The Irish have a proud history of migration and know—often from experience—what it means to be welcomed, or not, by their neighbours. You have made the world your neighbour through your generosity and willingness to help. For that, we thank you. Now let us stand with you. Let us help you and let us work together.