

## Tribute to Fr. Jim Cronin, Mill Hill Missionary



A PRIEST who helped Sunderland AFC through some of its darkest times has died days after suffering from a fall.

Father Jim Cronin was chaplain to the club in the late 1970s when it was in dire financial straits.

His brother Frank, now 80, took on the role as finance director, paying wages out of his own pocket as he helped turn around its fortunes.

A lifelong fan of the club, Fr Cronin was a season ticket holder at the Clock Stand in Roker Park before taking up a seat in the North Stand at the Stadium of Light alongside his family.

The 79-year-old, who lived in Whitburn in his later years, was born in Westfield Grove in Barnes and attended St Joseph's School and then Corby Hall Catholic Grammar School before going on to train as a priest.

He was ordained in 1959 and spent the first part of his career with the Catholic church in Kenya.

As a member of the Mill Hill Missionary, one of the largest in Britain, he helped build schools, churches and hospitals in the diocese of Ngong in Kenya and also developed a following of his beloved club in the communities he worked with.

He moved back to the UK in 1996 and helped run the administration of the society before returning to the North East in 2008 to become parish priest of St Bede's in Sacriston. In 2004, he took up the role of regional bursar for the mission until his retirement in 2012.

His nephew Paddy Cronin, who is chief executive officer of Wearside printing and manufacturing firm Edward Thompson, said: "His sense of humour was legendary, as was his devotion to Sunderland football club.

"A great entertainer and raconteur, he could keep young and old spellbound for hours.

"He was very practical, helping to build lots of schools and hospitals over in Kenya and was fearless

and brave to get this done.

“As a priest, he dealt with births, marriages and deaths, but he was much more than just that.

“He was a man of great warmth and faith.

“He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.”

Fr Cronin died on December 28 in Newcastle’s Royal Victoria Infirmary, two days after he fell at his home.

A vigil mass will be held at St Joseph’s in Paxton Terrace, Millfield, at 6pm on Monday.

A funeral will follow on the next day at noon St Bede’s in Sacriston with a burial in the parish.

Sunderland Echo - Angela McGhin