



**Fr Peter Swierczek, S.J.**  
**(1919-1996. In Zambia 1955-1996)**

**17 January 1996**

Peter Swierczek was born on 20 June 1919 in Grodek, a small locality in the south of Poland, near Nowy Sacz. His parents Valentine and Catherine had a small farm and worked hard to keep the family of four or five children fed, clothed and educated. The family was deeply attached to their faith. On the 18 August 1936 Peter began his novitiate in Stara Wies. Two years later his younger brother Joseph followed him and he is still working in Krakow. He took his vows at the juniorate in Pinsk in the east of Poland. It belongs now to Belo-Russia. Prince Radziwill had originally built the college, famous for the presence of St. Andrew Bobola who used it as his base for his missionary journeys and from which he finally went to his martyrdom in 1657. It was now a common juniorate for the two Polish provinces. Vincent Cichecki writes: "I met Peter there in the juniorate for the first time when I was a second year novice. He was a silent and focused person with a recollected demeanor.

With the outbreak of the World War, Germany invaded from the west while Stalin expanded his territories from the east. The rector of Pilsk, a brother of our Fr Zabdyr, told the scholastics to try and get to Lublin in the west, where he thought it would be easier to continue the formation program under the Germans rather than under the Russians in the east. With Peter and other juniors we continued our studies in a public lyceum but on 23 September the Germans arrested the teachers and the religious. We had several months of terrifying prison experience before being transported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. Later in December we were brought to Dachau near Munich in the south of Germany, where we spent the rest of the war. We were liberated on 29 April 1945 by a small detachment of the 8<sup>th</sup> American Army.

In the camp Peter worked on the farm and nearly met his death through hunger and exhaustion. He would not have made it through without the help of his companions. He was later shifted to work in the officers' vegetable garden which he was good at and so managed to survive.

On release he continued with his philosophy and theology and we were in the same group repeating and studying together. He had a poetic flare and would write short poems in Polish and French for various occasions. His hobby was always concerned with the garden and during all his long life he produced jams and fruit juices for the community. He was also in his youth very good at sports like volleyball, while in his older age he developed a passion for bridge.

He arrived in Zambia in 1953 and was assigned to Kasisi to work in the parish and oversee the garden. In 1955 he was transferred to Karenda which had just been opened. It was the most extensive parish in the country, stretching from the Kafue River in the west to the Great North Road in the east, a distance of 300 km. He spent long years continually traveling in a landrover going from outstation to outstation. At one

stage he had a faithful dog that even sat under his chair while he heard confessions. It was said that if a person had a mortal sin to confess, the dog would growl which speeded up the confession and the conversion! With all his travelling on the bumpy roads his health began to deteriorate after he lost a kidney. He was known as 'the hermit of Karenda' for he had been there for 17 years on his own. Eventually he was sent to Kasisi as the new community house was being constructed, which he duly supervised. He never complained about any of his ailments and even had to be forced to go to Poland for a hip operation in 1987.

He was a quiet person who rarely talked about himself or his own projects but was always ready to give his opinions on various topics, yet he would never hold the limelight. He joined the Society because he wanted to be a missionary in Africa. We all knew about it and during our philosophy in Belgium it was reinforced by the general spirit of the Belgian Province with their own extensive missions both in India and in Congo.

At 76 the Lord took his dedicated servant to himself. To us his passing seemed untimely, for it took place while on medical leave in Poland in 1995, Peter desired to come back and eventually be buried in Kasisi to the sound of beautiful Lenje funeral hymns - as he told his hosts, Fr Zeno Pilsyk's family in Poland, at Christmas in 1995. The Lord however did not grant his request, for he died in Krakow within a few weeks."