

26 January

## **Fr KARL-FERDINAND SCHMIDT**

15 May 1929 – 26 January 2007



Ferdie, as he was called, was born in Koblenz, Germany, and his father was an archivist and so fostered his interest in history. He entered the Society in 1950 and studied in Rottmannshohe, Pullach, Frankfurt and Chicago (history). In 1967 he joined the staff at St Albert's where he taught history and provide notes that long outlasted his stay.

In 1968 he moved to Chitsungo to help set up the mission where he remained until 1976. There he touched real history, Clemens Freyer tells us, as the first Jesuit in this part of the world, Gonçalo da Silveira, was martyred near Chitsungo in 1561, only five years after the death of St Ignatius. In 1977, Ferdie went to St Kizito's Murombedzi until 1986 when the new Chinhoyi diocese was set up and Bishop Reckter wanted him as Vicar General. Ferdie was an 'effortless' (Tony Bex) administrator and he was just the man to set up the new offices and commissions needed. 'He was very adept in dealing with authorities and agencies and could comprehend easily the rules of the game' (Joachim Petrausch).

At the same time he was a pastoral man, liturgically minded and he knew the value of celebrations. He would often say all the flurry of building in, first the mission and then the diocese, would bear no lasting fruit unless there was a sound foundation in Christian love in the people (Heribert Müller). His concern for the poor showed itself in his setting up a Nazareth centre for relief in Chinhoyi.

There were church celebrations but there were also social occasions when Ferdie shone. His Carnival (Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday) were an imaginatively prepared and memorable event for those who were present.

When President Mugabe wanted to establish a hospital at Kutama the task was given to Ferdie to establish it. Presidential money ran out and Ferdie had to search around to finish the job, which he did.

His last job was in the archives where lessons learnt from his father could be implemented. Towards the end of his life it became harder to understand what he was saying. Encephalitis was finally diagnosed and headed the list of reasons for his death in 2007.