

7 February

Fr KURT CZEKALLA 20 September 1912 – 7 February 1999

Fr Czekalla was born in Ratibor, Upper Silesia, now in Poland. The early inter-war years were marked by depression and political unrest. The young East German Province developed great influence among the youth through youth groups and retreats. Ordained during the war he wanted to go to the Russian mission and studied the Russian language and culture as well as Orthodox theology and liturgy. But his training almost led to his death. His accent aroused suspicion that he was a spy and he was arrested and condemned to death and shot. He was left lying there and, when he recovered consciousness, he crawled away and was helped by some kind people. When he had recovered, he made his way to West Germany.

His work for the new mission in Africa began when he became the first mission procurator for the Sinoia mission in 1958/9. He organised the work from Germany in finding financial resources. He started the pamphlet, *Sambesi*, to inform people in Germany about the work. It lasted until 1996 (37 years). 'Christianity', he wrote, 'has to prove that its truth and its freedom is a living truth and a worthwhile freedom. This proof is given by the life and work of the missionaries today and in the past.'

In 1967, when Fr Weisbrich became superior of the Sinoia mission, he wanted someone to deal with the mission's finances and the provincial sent him Fr Czekalla. He moved to Canisius House in Harare where Wolfgang Thamm remembers how he made the German Jesuits welcome. It helped that he was an excellent cook. One of those who enjoyed his cooking wrote, 'In my memory I see his big bearded head bent over a steaming pot and him savouring the goodness of what was cooking there. His food as well as his hospitality were excellent. He started a tradition carried on so well by Br Franz Gabriel.'

Dieter Scholz tells the story of how the German provincial came out to visit and he and Czekala were expressing their scepticism about the *n'anga* in tradition. Dieter was studying at the university at the time and offered to take them to meet a *n'anga*. As soon as they were introduced, the *n'anga* told Czekala that he had once been shot! He also told the provincial he had lost a brother in WW1, which was true.

When Helmut Reckter became mission superior, after Fr Weisbrich's tragic early death in a road accident, he decided to deal with the money himself and Czekalla returned home and became minister in a large house which cared for tertians and retired priests. After a few years he became parish priest of Berlin-Kladow. He built a new church for the parish. After a time he retired and became chaplain to sisters.