



**Fr Vincent Cichecki, S.J.**  
**(1920-2006. In Zambia 1953-2006)**

**14 March 2006**

Before Fr Vincent died, he wrote a short (15 page, single space) autobiography which is the basis of this obituary.

Fr Vincent was born in a small town called Parzeczew, Poland, on 9 October 1920. His brother Casimir, senior by two years, later became a Salesian priest and eventually came to Zambia where he died. Vincent's father died when he was eight months old, so his mother, to whom he was devoted, was left with the two boys to provide for, to bring up, to educate and to instill a deep faithfulness to the Church. She was a hard-working seamstress and opened a small shop which provided a modest living.

Vincent attended primary and secondary school and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Kalisz in 1937, and thus began a most active life in the service of the Lord. On 31 July 1939 he took his first vows and on 1st September, five weeks later, Hitler invaded Poland. Three months afterwards, Vincent was arrested with others and spent the next six years in concentration camps, mainly Dachau. He wrote: 'of great importance for survival in the camp was the good, close companionship in which people supported each other materially, morally and spiritually'.

After liberation, he continued his studies in Belgium, then in Britain at Stonyhurst College where he was ordained in 1950 and finally in the Oregon Province, USA for tertianship. A new life was beginning as he sailed for Africa, arriving in the then Northern Rhodesia in October 1953. For the next 53 years, Fr Vincent became involved in construction, administration in the Society, money matters and finally archivist.

After completing language studies, he was sent to build and be the parish priest of Matero (Lusaka) which he did for ten years. 'I consider these ten years the most happy time of my life' he wrote. While there he was appointed Superior of Lusaka Mission for three years, before the unification of Lusaka and Chikuni which Vincent worked to prepare.

For the next eight years, he was Education Secretary of Lusaka Diocese. Here his administrative ability, so obvious in Matero, came into play. His days were occupied with twenty-two primary schools which needed supervision, distribution of school equipment, salaries, reports and construction work. Sister Yolanta Balak, a Kasisi Sister, had been a great help in establishing Matero parish and now she also became involved in education with him. She was 'pastorally minded and dedicated to the people's spiritual and material welfare' and also a great friend. He constructed Education offices for this work. The Government took over the primary schools in June 1974 and Vincent, after eight years as Educational Secretary, moved into the job of treasurer of the Archdiocese. It was a most unenviable job, trying to balance the ambitious projects of the parishes and the lack of money to fund them. Six years of that was enough and he was granted a sabbatical year which he did in Rome.

On returning to Zambia, he was asked to be Education Secretary at the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC) for the whole country – 26 secondary schools situated all over Zambia. He was assisted by Mr Chitondo, an ex-inspector of schools, and they kept close contact with these schools, visiting, guiding, representing them to the Ministry of Education, and all this for eight years. In 1990, at the age of 70, he retired from this

work and became the Province Archivist until his death in 2006.

This brief outline does not show the many problems he experienced in his various works, e.g. the Emilio Mulolani movement in Matero parish; the abortive effort of local politicians with some teachers to take over Chassa Secondary School and the effort to introduce Scientific Socialism into the Catholic schools. Then there were misunderstandings from teachers and from his own brethren since he was a strict disciplinarian; at one stage he had a feeling that he was not welcome in the province. All these were crosses in his life.

From 1991 until he died, he had a series of illnesses and operations, yet 'I am going to the archives' was always his reply in spite of these. Under him, the present novitiate was built, as were the present archives extension. He was chaplain to ZAF and built the church there. The fine 1990 Zambia Catholic Directory was produced by him. No matter where he went or what he did, pastoral work was never neglected. He concluded his autobiography: "I am most grateful to the Lord for having led me all my life and assisting me in all my work. The prayers of so many of my friends all over the world, convents, but especially my mother and my brother Casimir, are responsible for my successes."