



Fr Waldmar Jozef Seidel, S.J.
(1882-1957. In Zambia 1921-1957)

17 March 1957

Waldmar Jozef Seidel was born at Katowice, just north of

Cracow, on 13 April 1882. His father was a German and his mother a Pole. He entered the Society at Stara Wies in 1900 and having followed the usual course of studies, was ordained in 1913 on the eve of the First World War. He was a chaplain in the Prussian army from 1915-1918. After the war he was a member of a renewal team in Sobotka for a few years.

He set out for the Polish Mission in 1921 when he was already 39 years old, in the company of Fr Spendel, Brs Markiewicz and Jedrzejczyk. He did the final lap of the journey from Salisbury to Katondwe in 16 days averaging 25 miles a day, on bicycle and on foot. His first assignment was at Katondwe and then at Kapoche for just over two years. At one stage, Fr Moskopp, his superior, requested him to translate a letter he had just received from the Provincial in Poland. Seidel duly complied, to the embarrassment of them both, because it was about Moskopp himself and contained a number of negative points!

He was appointed superior several times and in his 36 years on the Mission lived in every station including Kasisi and Kabwe and in his closing years in Lusaka. As a larger than life personality, he appeared on more than one occasion in the media published in South Africa. "Father Seidel is a 74-year old Pole with a rollicking sense of humor and a seven-inch beard." He was famous for his imitation of a lion roaring. He found it a useful talent when he met unwanted elephants and the like, for they all quietly moved away. However he learned from experience not to imitate a lion with people nearby as it could easily lead to general confusion if not outright terror.

While he was himself a pious and mortified religious and a strict observer of the rules, he knew how to let people live and carry on with their lives. He was replaced as superior at Katondwe by Fr Lazarewicz who immediately set about introducing certain reforms, although his imminent death mitigated them. Fr Seidel continued in administration in Chingombe and afterwards in Broken Hill.

Later when Mgr Wolnik sent him from Katondwe to Kasisi as minister, he set about building the orphanage anew with Br Gajdos who had just come up from Chikuni. He was also responsible for renewing three miles of the road between the Mission and Twin Palm in early 1935. Soon afterwards he was sent to run Kapoche. He came back again in due course to Kasisi as superior and in 1947 he handed over the job to the young and dynamic Fr Kozlowiecki, who a few years later, would become the Apostolic Administrator and then Archbishop of Lusaka.

He spent his last years in Lusaka where he finally succumbed to stomach cancer on 17 March 1957. A southern paper on 19 March reported the event using his other name of Joseph. 'Northern Rhodesia's oldest Roman Catholic missionary, Polish-born Father Joseph Seidel died in Lusaka at the week end... He spent many years in lonely bush stations and several times escaped death from lions and crocodiles.'