

29 March

Fr CORNELIUS O'DONOVAN 7 July 1922 – 29 March 2004



Neilus, as he was always known, was born in London of Irish ancestry and went to school at Wimbledon Jesuit College. As it was war time, he did his novitiate at St Beuno's and later studied English at Campion Hall. Ordained in 1955, he went to teach at St Aidan's in 1962 and moved to Rhodesia in 1967. He did a year at Gaba, the Pastoral Institute in Kampala in 1969 and on his return was at Mbare and the Cathedral, as Administrator (1972-6), before going to St Ignatius as rector, 1976-88. The community asked he be given a second term. He taught A level English in the school as well as Religious Education and he coached basketball.

It was war time and Neilus found himself, during his first term, hosting the guerrillas in the Jesuit community room. He did a sabbatical at Guelph Retreat Centre, Canada, in 1988, and returned to take charge of the pre-novitiate in 1989. He wrote a booklet to commemorate Chishawasha's centenary in 1992 but refused to put his name to it. In those days he could ferry all the candidates in his red Hilux and he was a fatherly figure for them. But dementia was taking hold. He once could not remember where he parked in town and called the police to say his car was stolen. A day or two later a 'pre-novice' noticed it in town, parked where Neilus had left it.

In 1997, he was at Rothwell farm and in 2001 retired to St Ignatius. Tony Bex was at the seminary at that time and said Neilus would walk down every day, sometimes twice a day, to see him and have a chat. But there was also the painful moment when he hitched a lift to town and wandered round not knowing where he was. He ended up by the President's house and was roughed up a bit by the guards until they realised his condition and who he was. He died at Nazareth House.

He was 'kind, gentle and quiet' throughout his life.