

2 April

JOSEPH MANDAZA 1932-2016

Courage Bakasa described Mukoma Joe as “an extremely gifted and enthusiastic catechist, a keen musician and a natural teacher”. His lasting memory of Br Joe Mandaza was of him “walking the streets of Mbare, rosary in hand, stopping every so often to greet some of the faithful along the way especially the young ones”.



He was born in Zimbabwe on the feast of St Joseph in 1932 near Shamva, not far from Harare towards the NE. His Catholic parents sent him to school to Marymount Mission recently opened and from there he went to Kutama Teacher Training College. He was a long distance runner and missed winning the 1958 national championship at Kutama by a whisker. He told his father of his desire to join the Jesuits and he did not object though he reminded him of his obligation to contribute to the education of his siblings. Joe compromised and worked as a teacher for a year saving all his salary which he gave to his father. In 1959 he was ready to enter the Society and was received at Silveira House, Chishawasha, first as a postulant and then as a novice. After vows in 1963 he taught at Mvurwi and later at Mazowe where he was headmaster for 15 years.

After tertianship at St Ignatius College he was one of the team selected by Bishop (not yet Archbishop) Chakaipa in the early 1975 to run a training programme for lay Church leaders, called the Christian Community Programme (CCP). The trainers were seven lay people and three religious. Silveira House had the task of training the trainers and Joe and his companions, who included another Jesuit brother, Canisius Chishiri, spent four months at the centre for this purpose

After the training, the ten were assigned to different missions and parishes to run courses for lay leaders. As he moved around Joe had to accept whatever place he was given to stay and whatever food was put before him. His health began to suffer. Funding was scarce and the lay members soon fell by the wayside. But the three religious carried on until Canisius and Sr Gemma were assigned to other work. Joe remained the sole flag bearer of the CCP and in one way or other he continued this programme for the rest of his life. In mission after mission he concentrated on training lay leaders and developed a healthy down to earth approach. Maybe his theology was a little dated but people were inspired by the man, whatever the currency of the message.

Joe made his final vows to Fr General Pedro Arrupe when he visited the country in 1976. Courage Bakasa tells us “he was so proud of this occasion and often mentioned it.” Later Joe was to be the first Zimbabwean Jesuit to celebrate 50 years in the Society

Confident without being complacent, he ploughed his chosen furrow as teacher and trainer for years. He was methodical and deliberate – his inserting a key in a door was once described as being like threading a needle – and he was ever reliable. Normally gentle in his

disposition he could be fiery in his talks and preaching. As already mentioned, he was a keen and competitive athlete in his youth and it was hard to put this together with his later mild and deliberate ways.

He liked to dress formally and could always be seen in his clerical collar. Fidelis Mukonori tells the story of how a guerrilla commander told him to “take off your Roman collar. You are lucky. I am the commander but if some of these juniors had seen you first they would have shot you.” He said this because of Methodist Bishop Muzorewa who wore a clerical collar and had settled with Ian Smith. Joe was shaken.

After the war he worked in pastoral work in the Musami area where he was a demanding catechist and there were stories of people having to wait seven years or more for baptism because Joe was not satisfied with their grasp of the faith. He was so strict that a petition was written to have him removed!

Eventually he did move to Harare and worked at Rockwood Pastoral Centre continuing his training work and he did a refresher course at Lumko in South Africa. He also translated the Spiritual Exercises into Shona to make them accessible to a wider range of people. In 2010 he moved to Chishawasha as the Pastoral Administrator of the parish supervising all the catechetical programmes in the valley. “He was very reliable and committed” say Fr Mukonori who was the parish priest.

He was a man of prayer and was once locked up in the chapel at Musami when the sister who closed the chapel for the night did not notice him there. He also fasted when he had a particular need and encouraged others ‘wisely’ to do likewise. But he overdid his fasting and damaged his health. A doctor, who knew him because Joe had him once at Rockwood on a course, patiently advised him of the dangers to his health.

Joe loved to be asked to play his piano accordion though he did not seem to have a wide repertoire of tunes. But he loved to bring joy to people with his music.

Joe was noticeably happy and content with being a Jesuit. Like others who joined in the 1960s and ‘70s he had to put up with a lot of insensitivity and crassness from his white brothers in the Society. He became angry when he recalled how he and another Jesuit brother were treated. They had separate lodgings from the priests and food was ‘rationed’. One priest tried to use the confessional as a moment to lecture Joe on obedience. Joe became furious and threatened to “kill you with this kneeler.” That was the end of the confession! But Joe had the magnanimity to let slights and misunderstandings fall away like water off a duck’s back. Although he expressed his anger he did not linger on the how he was treated. He never yearned to be anywhere other than where he was, or to do anything other than what he was doing.

We use the word ‘holy’ without being able to describe what it means. But we know it when we see it. And we saw it in Joe.