

Fr Josip Weissgerber, S.J.
(1922-1985. In Zambia 1981-1983)

18 April 1985

Josip Weissgerber was born on 4 May 1922 in Vinkovci, eastern Croatia. His father's people came originally from Germany and his mother's from France. His father died young and his mother was left to bring up her three sons. She was a very devout person and wished that all three would become priests – and even Jesuits – which in divine providence actually occurred.

Josip did his primary education locally and his secondary at a Jesuit minor seminary in Travnik, Bosnia. He was an excellent student, always alive and active even managing to control his short temper all his life!

He joined the Jesuits in Jordanaovac, Zagreb and always wanted to be a missionary. Even in his early stages of formation he developed his gifts for writing and music. He continued in Zagreb for philosophy (1942-45) and his regency was in the diocesan minor seminary run by Ours (1945-48). He studied his theology in Palmoticeva. He was ordained in 1952 with his younger brother Stanko, in his native Vinkovci (the older brother Antun had been ordained some time before).

After his tertianship (1954-55) in Dubrobnik he worked in the Minor Seminary of that diocese teaching a variety of subjects. His mother lived also on the premises of the seminary and died there in 1978.

He continued his ministry in seminary training in Zagreb up to 1966 being a competent and well liked master of different subjects.

He was endowed with a keen mind and a great capacity for work and so from 1961 onwards he continued his studies of German and psychology at Zagreb University. In the late sixties he completed his higher studies both in psychology and in philosophy at Louvain University, Belgium, so that between 1970 and 1972 he took doctorates in both disciplines. His philosophical thesis on Ernst Mach was later published.

Despite the great variety of teaching commitments, he also found time for pastoral work especially in family ministry. He was a co-founder of the Institute for the Family, and so was well known all over Croatia. He wrote a dozen books in Croatian and published widely in various journals. In the midst of all of this activity he also composed music and used to play a number of instruments including the organ.

His missionary desire became a reality in his fifty-ninth year when he took on a teaching commitment in Mpima Major Seminary in Kabwe. His three years in Mpima were fruitful but already his health was in decline and he was dismayed at the lack of a properly trained staff.

He returned home and continued to work in Zagreb but increasing sickness led to an early end at the age of 63. He died a few years after his return on 18 April 1985. His friend Mgr Mijo Skvorc, the auxiliary Bishop of Zagreb, performed the funeral ceremonies before a large crowd of both religious and lay friends.