



**Fr John Waligora, S.J.**  
**(1890-1968. In Zambia 1929-1968)**

**2 May 1968**

The names Waligora and Katondwe always go together. He often confronted the colonial authorities at Feira on behalf of the people of the Luangwa Valley. As he said himself 'I came to the Boma and will die for them'.

Fr John was born at Koabylczyna in Cracow Province, Poland, on 30 April 1890. He entered the Jesuits in 1908 and, after vows, followed the normal studies of formation. He was ordained priest in Cracow in 1921. In January of 1929, he came to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) with two Jesuit brothers and four Polish sisters (who took over from the Dominican Sisters in Kasisi).

Apart from nine years (1935-1944), Fr John spent about 30 years in Katondwe. When he arrived there, he set about building the large church of the Holy Spirit with its intricate design.

Waligora (he was always known as just that) developed a fund raising campaign for this, contacting fellow Poles from his home mountainous region who had migrated to America. He also persuaded Brother Stofner to write to Benito Mussolini, President of Italy, and succeeded in getting £45 which was used towards the construction of the bell tower. Being a shrewd operator, he knew that if the project was completed quickly, he would lose the brother builders and the laborers would find no work. So he interrupted the construction of the church in order to erect a substantial primary school. Even before the church was completed, he was transferred to Chingombe, then to Broken Hill (Kabwe). He was sent, for a short time, to Abercorn (Mbala) to a Polish refugee settlement but clashed with the colonial officials there.

He returned to his beloved Katondwe in 1944 where he remained for the rest of his life, being superior for 20 years of this time. In 1949, the Colonial Administration decided to resettle the valley population because of unhealthy conditions, mainly tsetse fly and the associated sleeping sickness. Waligora was determined to prevent this. He organized the children to collect tsetse flies and paid a penny for each hundred of these. It was estimated that 38,000 tsetse flies were destroyed in this way. Some clever children collected what had been dumped and re-sold them again! He requested five rifles to arm hunters to clear the area of wild animals (the hosts of the tsetse flies) but was told that the meat was government property. He wanted it for the school children and the people. He kept the dead wild animals until they were stinking and then brought them to the Boma. He was then told he could keep the meat! He was well on his way to becoming a legend. In 1952/53 he built a small chapel to Our Lady on a nearby hill called Golgotha, in thanksgiving for the successful outcome.

He also built a 20 bed hospital in spite of the authorities who wanted just a clinic at Katondwe. He also built and staffed a school. In recognition of his work in the valley, he was decorated with an MBE in 1961 by the Colonial Administration.

He was a unique and complex character. He cared for 'his people'. His long stay at Katondwe made him a law unto himself and few could deter him when he set out to do something. He was very open and had great respect for the local people. He was also greatly respected by them, given titles of respect like 'Ayavu' (our father) or 'Ambuya basu' (our grandparent), for he had their welfare at heart and they knew it. Some also called him a witch but never to his face!

Sr Brigid Tembo composed her research paper for the BA at UNZA entitled, *An Investigation on the Influence of Fr John Waligora on the Chikunda and Nsenga-Luzi Peoples of the Luwangwa Valley as reflected in Songs and Legends about him* (1994). He was a man with a powerful personality in the eyes of the people and at the same time not always an easy man to live with. He died at Katondwe and was buried there in 1968.