



Br Francis Überman, S.J.
(1897-1991. In Zambia 1929-1975)

3 May 1991

Francis Überman was born on 30 August 1897 in the small village of Mokra Strona, near Przymysl in south eastern Poland. Very little is known about his early years except that he attended school in nearby Lezajsk and then in Debica near Rzeszow.

He entered the novitiate at Stara Wies at the age of 27 and remained there as the sacristan and, later on, working in the carpentry shop. Towards the end of 1928 he was allowed to join a group of Jesuits, among whom was Fr John Waligora, who were setting off for Northern Rhodesia. They arrived on 15 January 1929.

Being a practical and skillful man and at the same time genuinely obedient, being happy with any job he was given, he was from the start in great demand for all kinds of work. Probably he will be best remembered as a builder. He passed through all the different mission stations of the time: Kasisi, Chingombe, Chikuni and later Mpima, Mpunde, etc. In his latter days he would say that of all the places he had been in, he loved Chingombe the best where he spent 11 years (1930-1941), even though his health was not so good there. In 1950, after nine years in Chikuni, he was sent for a year's rest in Johannesburg. On his return he was assigned to Kasisi.

When Fr Chimukoshi Nowicki started building in Bwacha in 1955 he was given the task of supervising the construction of the church. He completed it by 1958. Two years later Fr Zylka was sent to open Mpunde Mission. At the very outset he asked for Br Überman. They formed a good team – a younger priest and an older experienced brother who was willing to 'serve without counting the cost'. Later on he often said that: 'he never had such a good, caring and understanding superior'. As well as the Church, community house etc. he was asked to construct the novitiate for the Handmaid Sisters. Things went slowly as he only had one bricklayer and three workers. He would often say 'in Africa there is plenty of time'. He was then approaching 70 and his sight was suddenly failing and he lost one eye. Fr Zylka's sudden death in 1971 at the age of 60, was a terrible blow to him. In 1973 he was transferred to Kasisi since Mpunde was handed over to the Diocesan clergy and his own health was deteriorating. In 1975 he was offered a chance to take home leave – his first ever, and he was thrilled at the prospect. He was already 78 with little possibilities of getting adequate medical attention, so he left with a heavy heart for he really wanted to come back.

Given his weak physical condition and his increasing blindness, he asked if he could be the doorkeeper at the novitiate in Stara Wies where he worked for quite some time. He still wrote letters back to Zambia and was always eager to hear the news. Eventually he went completely blind but lived until he was 94 having spent 46 years in Zambia.