

May 12

## Fr ERIC EDMONSTONE

3 July 1906 – 12 May 1969



Eric Edmonstone was born in Gwanda and so was the first ‘locally born’ Jesuit in the province. He was educated at St George’s in Bulawayo in the early twenties when the school had passed the glories of its early days. Fr Fran Jones recorded his first impressions:

My expectations of finding the college the leading school in Southern Rhodesia received a decided setback. It had an auspicious beginning in that it was the first school ever in the colony and so received all the flattering notice of ‘the great’ and the patronage. The college did pass through a certain stage of celebrity in its earlier years, but by the time I arrived there it was all *Ichabod*. The community was dreadfully clothed ... The food was worse and the cheapest....

But none of this deterred Edmonstone from entering the novitiate in 1928 after a time in mining and the Rhodesian Civil Service. He did his regency at Chishawasha. In 1935 he developed TB and lost a year of theology before ordination in 1939. In 1941, despite the war, he managed to return to the country and spent a while at Kutama learning Shona. Then, in 1942, he became superior of St Michael’s Mhondoro but within months the TB returned to trouble him and he lost a lung. He went to convalesce in the south (Graaf-Reinet).

A year later he was back and at the Seminary where he taught Dogma and other subjects. Bernard Latchford, who was at the Seminary then, remembered how Eric used to call Chichester’s monthly meetings ‘wiggings’, that is, exhortations to greater efforts. The bishop often asked the staff, ‘Do you honestly think that this change will make the seminarians love God more?’

In 1952, he moved to be chaplain at St John’s School in Avondale, Salisbury, where he developed a keen interest in the Sodality of our Lady, promoting it countrywide. He brought together blacks, whites and people of mixed race and clearly saw the benefits of this way of building bridges. By 1965 he was at Musami and became the Novice Master of the faltering Claver Brothers Congregation. When that venture finally ended a year or so later, he devoted himself to pastoral work but ill health finally conquered his great spirit. He died in St Anne’s Hospital.