

May 20

Fr AEMILIAN SCHMITZ

11 October 1870 – 20 May 1953



Born at Vierson, on the Lower Rhine, Emil – his first name seems to have been quickly shortened – Schmitz struck some of his contemporaries as more suited to being a general in the army than a missionary in the bush. He was a tough brisk worker all his 83 years. He was also shy and the theory is he covered this up by his brusqueness but this was only a shell. ‘It was everybody’s business to penetrate that shell’ and get through to the real man he was. The local people called him *Simbi*, (iron, that is,

strong). He fulfilled Ignatius’ advice that we be *fortiter in re* (strong in action) even if he could not quite manage the second bit *suaviter in modo* (gentle in manner).

He entered the Jesuits in 1890 and was first destined for Chile but Fr Richartz diverted him to Rhodesia. Ordained in 1902, he found himself in charge of Chishawasha when Richartz moved to Empandeni in 1906 (check). One of his skills was curing tobacco and he acquired a cigar making machine – a ‘first’ for Chishawasha.

But he did not stay long. Driefontein had been bought and he was asked to set out with Regis Chigwedere, father of the priest of the same name, with five mule drawn wagons on the two-week journey there to found a new mission. He started schools in the more populated adjacent lands of Chirumanzi where two of his outstations grew into missions: St Joseph’s Hama and Holy Cross. He had the task of building and staffing the schools.

In 1922 he went back to Germany for a while but he returned to Chishawasha in 1924. In 1930 he was asked to take over Triashill from the Mariannahills who had left their flourishing missions in



Community at Seminary, 1936; Fr. Schmitz sitting to right of His Lordship.

Manicaland that year, in an ill-managed exchange with the Jesuits, for the missions in Matabeleland.

In 1936, he was judged just the man to get the new seminary at Chishawasha going (see picture on page 1). The following year he was back to Triashill and later St Barbara's until it was handed to the Carmelites in 1950. He then went to Musami where he apologised to the mission superior for not being of much use. But he did hear confessions and preach – in his booming voice - and make furniture in the carpentry shop. He moved back to St Benedict's where he had been earlier and built a dormitory and two classrooms. After 18 months he retired to Chishawasha but his heart was giving out. He was 'ready to go. The sooner the better.' He died in St Anne's.