

May 21

Fr FRANCIS RICHARTZ

17 June 1864 – 21 May 1928



One of the 'greats' of the Zambezi Mission, Francis Richartz was born at Koblenz on the Rhine. He had a technical training before joining the novitiate in

1876. Ordained ten years later he led the group of two priests and five brothers who, on arrival in 1892, all went to Chishawasha to build up the mission that had just be founded. They travelled the last 800 miles from the south by ox-wagon. No one lived in Chishawasha when they arrived and all there was to greet them was a blackened valley after a bush fire. Yet, within a few years, they transformed it into cultivated fields, orchards, gardens and plantations. By 1896 there were 1,000 living in the valley.

The Rising of 1896 was great blow and, it seems, there was an attempt to kill Richartz. A man entered his office with a knife but Br Biermann arrived at that moment and the man recoiled. After the Rising they made a fresh start and found the people more willing to work with them. The parents consented to let their children go to school and learn about the faith. Less than three years later 300 had been instructed and baptised.

By 1899 Richartz was exhausted and went to Europe for a year. On his return he took up his work again and by 1904 there were 1,000 on the baptism register. But again he was worn out and was ordered to Dunbrody to rest. He had nothing to do there and accepted an invitation to write several accounts of the *Customs and Habits of the MaShona* (cf. ZMR II). He then went to Empandeni where he had to learn a new language and begin again in his work of pastoral instruction.

He would travel to the out schools in a donkey cart and celebrate Mass in a classroom, administer the sacraments, attend to the sick and instruct the catechumens.

In 1909, he was called back to Chishawasha where he soon noticed the lack of outstations. He set out for Kutama and Murombedzi, beyond it, and later the first steps at Musami were made. Marriage settlements tired him and by 1920 he was exhausted. He left Chishawasha and, after medical treatment in Bulawayo, went to Driefontein from which the outstations of Holy Cross, St Joseph's and Gokomere were founded. Eventually he retired to St John's in Salisbury where he did instructions and extended the school. 35 years after his arrival, some of the boys he had welcomed into his first school in Chishawasha carried his coffin to the grave in Chishawasha where Br Krechel carved a large stone cross in his memory. Richartz and Prestage are the only two of the early Jesuits who have a house in Zimbabwe named after them.