

June 12

Br FRANCIS FITZSIMMONS 23 June 1932 – 12 June 2008



Born at Didsbury, Manchester, and orphaned at the age of four, Fitz was brought up 'with loving care' by the Sisters of Charity in Preston. Before Vatican II they wore tall starched white head gear and were nicknamed 'the Yachting Club'. They looked like a flock of swans. One particular French nun seems to have been an adoptive mother to Fitz and he had a picture

of her in his room at Silveira House.

After leaving school he trained as a French polisher and joined the Society when he was twenty-seven in 1959. He was asked to go out 'stiffen the core' of the first novices at Silveira House (see photo, Fitz standing extreme right), that same year and he was further asked to stay on after his first vows. He then worked doing 'general duties' at St Ignatius, recently founded, before moving to St George's in 1965. Two years later he went to Silveira House to help John Dove in the administration and, for example, added to the plantation of trees begun by Fr Wallace.

He took an interest in the youth at Mabvuku and taught them 'ballroom dancing' and drama and one year they did a Passion Play. Two of the actors he trained, Dominic Kanaventi and Walter Mapurutsa, went on to successful careers in theatre and film. Dominic starred in *Neria*, a homegrown Zimbabwe film. Fitz's work was part of the foundation of the Catholic Youth Association which was later developed into almost a mass youth movement by Fidelis Mukonori and his team. Fitz also used to take his youth to Kariba and other places camping. He trained to be a referee for soccer and became a figure on the national stage at Gwanzura. He joined the Rhodesville Catholic church choir.

In 1975, the Mission Superior, Patrick MacNamara, called him to be his secretary and he moved to Garnet House. He used to go to St George's to teach himself the piano and eventually moved there. But Michael O Halloran says he was 'rather wary of the school and its life and confined himself to his tasks as minister and bursar. But he did set up the school laundry in 1979 which was a big contribution. He eventually moved back to St Ignatius in the 1980s and was the bursar and accountant and in charge of the junior dormitory. He used to take students to St Catherine's Home for children living with intellectual disabilities.

In 2003 he returned to the UK. He had never asked to go to Africa and always felt a bit out of place. He enjoyed his five remaining years at Stamford Hill and used to cross the city to meet people coming from Zimbabwe at Jesuit Missions in Wimbledon. As his cancer developed, he retired to Boscombe where he was happy to spend his last days.