



**Fr Casimir Konopka, S.J.**  
**(1879-1941. In Zambia 1931-1933)**

**26 June 1941**

Casimir Konopka was born on 10 January 1879 at Tarnow in south-east Poland. He entered the Society at Stara Wies in 1894 on his fifteenth birthday! He began his philosophy in Nowy Sacz (1899-1902) and then completed his humanities at secondary level from 1902-1904 in Chyrow. He did his theology in Cracow from 1904-1907 and was ordained in 1906. He then studied history and geography in the Education Department at Jagiellonski University (1906-1910) which is the oldest in the country dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. He completed his tertianship in Tarnopol in 1912-1913.

He was quite an extraordinary person and had an unusual career. He began teaching in Chyrow from 1910-1912, while lecturing in Church history at the theological faculty in Cracow (1913-1914). From 1915 he served as chaplain in the Polish Army and, later under General Haller, in the 1918-1920 conflict with Russia, despite the fact that Poland had at last recovered its independence with the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War. He was a gifted chaplain who could relate well both with the rank and file as well as the senior officers. He got to know Marshall Pilsudski well which later proved provident for the Society. He published an interesting book on the whole situation at the time.

After peace had been agreed upon, he used his influence with Pilsudski, now the Head of State, to get back from the Polish Army a property that was once our college in Pinsk. It was here that St Andrew Bobola lived before his final apostolic journey that led to his martyrdom in 1657. He was appointed prefect of the Government Teachers' Training College in Chelm Lubelski and sometime later in 1921-1922 he taught at the Jesuit school in Wilno.

He was involved with the Church's work in health care and was chaplain to the Polish Mobile Hospital at Helm Lubelski. He had much contact with Sr Boleslawa Lament (now Blessed), the foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family, whose work with youth had to remain underground for many years due to the prevailing conditions. Years later, after official recognition, the Sisters would come to Zambia in 1970.

However as the years went by, Fr Konopka became more critical of the heavy handedness, not to say dictatorship, of Pilsudski and his superiors thought it better that he leave the country for some time. Thus he was sent to the Polish Mission of Lusaka in 1931.

He was an inspector of schools from 1931 to 1933 and visited many of the stations, but after his brother became provincial it was reckoned to be safe for him to return which he did in 1933, as the Head of State was nearing his end. He taught history and geography in Chyrow from 1933-1938 and then was transferred to Lwow (Lvov) to the retreat house of St Joseph, being minister of the house. He continued to make propaganda for the Mission by writing articles.

A few years later, while in Lwow, now in the Ukraine, he was accidentally killed by a stray bullet when the city was occupied by the Russians in the Second World War. He died on 26 June 1941.