

7 July

Br DENNIS ADAMSON

6 June 1946 – 11 July 1997



Dennis Adamson seems to have had no family of his own and was adopted at the age of six by the Mayhew family. They were trying to contact him at the time of his adoptive father's death which occurred at the same time as the province was trying to contact them about his death. He went to school at St John's Avondale which, at that time, was known as school for people of mixed race. His secondary education was a struggle despite the kindness of Sr Lucy Ann and Fr Eric Edmonstone. When he discerned a vocation and joined the novitiate in 1964, he wanted to be a priest but was told he would not be able to manage the studies. He accepted this but it resulted in a life-long frustration.

He also accepted the plan for him to go to Scotland to study motor mechanics but again it only frustrated him and later he never became involved in it. His interest, Mark Hackett, who was with him in Musami, tells us was in people and he was a great conversationalist and knew everything that was going on at the mission. When the liberation war crept up on Musami, Dennis tried to keep his ear to the ground and was as astonished as Mark was when the mission was attacked and seven missionaries were killed in 1977. Their surprise supports the view that it was a group unknown in the area that carried out the attack. And this fits with the widely held, but not universally accepted, view that the Selous scouts were responsible.

A glimpse of what sort of person Dennis was is provided also by Mark. There was a dispute between two sisters at the mission and the mother general was called in and decided on moving one of the sisters. She was furious and returned to the mission privately and threatened Mark. When Dennis heard of it, he went straight to her room and when she would not admit him, he broke the window and threatened to break down the door. He scared the life out of her and she was gone in the morning.

The Jesuits stayed at St Paul's after the massacre but Dennis kept a close watch and sometimes put his own life in danger as he sought to keep in touch with the guerrillas. At one point he discovered one of them, in a drunken mood, was annoyed with Nigel Johnson who had pointed out he would be unable to shoot straight if he was drunk and started calling the missionaries 'sell-outs' – a

highly dangerous accusations that could end in a person's death. Dennis, of course, quickly discovered what was happening and advised Mark to consult the archbishop and the provincial. While Mark and Nigel were away he took the initiative and packed essential goods in the lorry and was ready to move to town when they came back with the news the authorities did think the time had come for them all to withdraw.

After the war Dennis served in the School of Social Work, Chishawasha, Marymount and St Albert's and again in Musami. He was invited to a meeting of young Jesuits in formation and Joe Arimoso remembers the passionate way in which he spoke about his Jesuit vocation. He suffered a great deal in his last illness and a LCBL postulant who visited him said, 'he was a gentle and loving man and really compassionate and concerned about suffering. ... He was in pain but managed to console us when he saw that we were troubled by his suffering. "Don't worry. It's OK", he said'.