

28 July

## **Br TOBIAS TIRIVANHU** 28 December 1941 – 28 July 2001



Tobias Emmanuel Tirivanhu was born in Chishawasha and worked with the Jesuits at St Ignatius College in its founding years in the early 1960s. He joined the Society in 1965. The opportunities for education in those days were minimal and Toby did not go beyond primary level. He wanted to become a priest but, in the accepted wisdom of the time, his academic level precluded this and he was accepted as a brother. He was not invited to pursue academic studies but was pointed in the direction of technical qualifications. There were 30 brother novices in the British province in those days, more than half the number (54) of scholastic novices. So one can have some idea of the mentality behind the decision and Toby humbly accepted it, at least at the time. In Glasgow, where he was for five years, he qualified as a plumber – and became a Scotsman! He had such a friendly way with him that he quickly adapted to the culture and his accent was soon contaminated by local expressions. The present writer once asked him about the health of one of his relatives and he replied, ‘I think he’s going to kick the bucket’!

Joe Hampson, who knew Toby well, was to say of him, ‘he was a profound observer of people ... to walk round Mbare with Toby was to meet a huge variety of men and women, boys and girls, whose lives had been touched by him. Through his fanatical following of St Peter’s netball teams, his religious and metal work classes and his visits to the sick he brought laughter and a sense of being loved and respected which they will never forget. In his simple yet powerful way he taught many of us, here and abroad, about living and loving and so gave us a glimpse of the Spirit.’ There was suffering in his family and in his own life but nothing could erase the joy that kept coming out. Roland von Nidda said ‘if bursts of laughter could be heard from groups of boys and girls at Makumbe, you could be sure to find Toby in the middle of them.’ Thomas? was a student at St Peter’s Kubatana who admitted that he had lost his way. ‘Br Toby sorted me out and put me on the straight path.’ Many would say the same. He worked with Anthony ‘Jeep’ Davis and Dominic Shoniwa at Kubatana. From 1975. He did a course in catechetics in Dublin in 1987 and on his return became an assistant pastor at St Peter’s Mbare. He helped at Canisius House in 1997 and went on sabbatical to Gonzaga, NW USA, in 1997. On his return he went to Makumbe as boarding master and counsellor. In 2000 he became seriously ill and had to go to Richartz house where he died. It was a hard year for him and he had to fight depression but he always answered ‘fine’ to any query about his health and wanted the conversation to move on. His funeral was marked by deep sorrow at his going but also joy in celebrating his generous and courageous life.