



**Fr William Weller, S.J.**  
**(1906-1968. In Zambia 1966-1968)**

**8 August 1968**

To move from a cool temperate zone to tropical lands is quite a change. To move from a life of academic studies to the daily headache of being procurator or bursar is also a big change. To combine both changes at the age of 60 can be quite heroic. This is what Fr William (Bill) Weller did in 1966.

Fr Bill was born in Spokane, Washington, USA on 13 March 1906. As a boy he attended Gonzaga Prep School and Lewis and Clark High School. He then entered the Society at the age of twenty in Los Gatos, California. After the usual studies, he was ordained at Santa Clara, California, in 1939. After tertianship he began a continuous 25 year period in the academic life. He became Dean of Faculties at Gonzaga University from 1942 to 1947 and followed at the same university as Head of the Theology Department from 1947 to 1951. For eight years, 1951 to 1959, he was appointed to be prefect of studies of the Oregon Province. 'In Fr Weller's hands will be the responsibility for assuring that the university departments of Seattle University and Gonzaga are second to none and that all the Jesuit high schools of the Pacific North-West are capably staffed'. His next move was from theology to philosophy as assistant professor of philosophy at Seattle University from 1959 to 1966. During these years he also conducted retreats for laity and was at times called upon to be guest speaker at a number of functions.

The big change came in 1966 when he was missioned to Zambia in Africa as procurator or bursar for the archdiocese of Lusaka. What a change! First he resided in Kabwe and then moved to Lusaka. While at Kabwe, a lot of correspondence took place between Fr Bill and the Archbishop's secretary, Fr P Walsh. The bursar's job was new to Fr Bill and he had to learn the hard way about cancelled checks but not returned, omission of checks on bank statements, bank errors, missing checks, paying of refunds and subsidies, vehicle insurance, all a far cry from the study of dogma or being. While in Kabwe he was superior of the house and he also included pastoral work in the adjoining church.

A big item was the saying of vernacular Mass introduced by Vatican II. Though he himself loved Latin he did not understand why people should be obliged to participate in a Mass they did not understand. The issue was resolved by allowing one Latin Mass a month for the 'old timers'.

He was transferred to Lusaka to the Archbishop's residence, which was much more convenient for the work he was doing, since the residence also housed the secretary. Just two years after his arrival, Fr Bill died. An extract from a letter to the Oregon Provincial from Fr Leon Kapfer, the superior of the Lusaka Mission, reads, 'Later the cleaning boy went into Bill's room and tried to wake him, but when he got no response he told the cook who went down to Roma Secondary School about a mile away and told the sisters that something was wrong with Fr Weller. As you may know, the Archbishop's house has no phone. The sisters called Fr Walsh at the office and he went immediately to the house where he found Bill dead. We called a doctor who came and pronounced Bill dead for about four or five hours from a coronary. This was about noon, so he must have died about 7.00 a.m. We all really miss Bill's deep voice, deep priestly faith, and his strong loving friendship'.