



Fr Joseph Svec, S.J.
(1923-1990. In Zambia 1952-1964)

8 August 1990

Joseph Svec was born in Komjatice, southern Slovakia on 5 March 1923. As a young man of 17 he entered the novitiate at Ruzomberok. He began his philosophy in Trnava and completed it in Brno from 1944-1947 because of the war situation. As he desired to be a missionary in the Zambian mission, he was sent for theology (1947-1951) to Dublin, Ireland so that he could learn English. He was ordained there on 31 July 1950. He then went to Cleveland, Ohio in the States for tertianship (1951-1952).

He headed soon afterwards to Lusaka. In his dozen years here, his work was mainly in education, with the organizing and building of primary schools in Kasisi, Katondwe, Kabwe and also Chingombe. He acquired a good knowledge of chiNyanja and so he was always involved in pastoral ministry wherever he went. Although hampered by rheumatism, which sometimes hindered his sleep, he was constantly on the move.

He was an outgoing and capable person but he preferred the open fields of the rural missions and in many ways his years at Katondwe were the most fruitful for him. Some years later after leaving Zambia, he produced two booklets describing his earlier experiences: *Africa My Love* (1974) and *The Zambezi River*. The former is a well written book describing his life and feelings during his years in the Luangwa Valley. Some of the episodes make memorable reading.

His life in Katondwe, organizing the teachers, providing material support, giving clear leadership, were among his happiest times. He loved hunting and became quite proficient, as many of his stories recount. He has a poignant account of going on a hunting expedition across the Luangwa River into Mozambique for wild game to provide some meat for the students' end of the year party. As they were getting into the canoe, the head boy Peter slipped and fell into the river which was about ten feet deep at that point. He came up once in great agony as a lurking crocodile under the water pulled him to his death before their very eyes.

During the War he had been in the frontline field hospital and so had a smattering of medical knowledge. While in the United States for his formation he took a short medical course. All of this knowledge was put to good use in helping the people around the mission. When Fr Waligora completed the hospital, he became the superintendent. He claims that it was really because no one else was willing to take on the paper work!

After leaving Zambia in 1964, he spent a year in Rome as secretary to Bishop Pavel Hnilica, S.J. in the Russian College (1964-1965). He came back to Africa for a year and worked in St Ignatius, Chishawasha in Harare (1966-1967) where, among other activities, he was helped out with the new buildings.

He then went to Canada living in the Slovak community in Ontario and ministered to the many Slovaks in the area. He finally spent some time in pastoral work in the Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius in New Westminster in British Columbia on the west coast of Canada, quite near Vancouver.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Iron Curtain folded up. With the newly gained religious freedom, many of the countries, previously under Soviet control, were now looking for priests to re-open the old Churches and begin more publicly the service

of the people of God. Fr General sent out a request that all personnel who originally came from these areas should think of returning, even if they had been out for most of their adult life. Fr Svec promptly answered that call at the age of 76 and set off to return to his beloved Slovakia but the Good Lord had a more permanent mission for his faithful servant. On arrival at the airport in Bratislava on the 8 August 1990 he collapsed and died.