



Fr Eugene Pierre, S.J.
(1914-1979. In Zambia 1967-1973)

17 August 1979

Fr Gene (as he was called) was a late vocation, he entered the Society at Sheridan, Oregon, in 1950 at the age of 36. He was born at St Peter's Mission, south of Great Falls near Cascade, Montana on 21 November 1914.

At a very early age (they say at the age of 5) he began picking out tunes on the keyboard of the piano and later learned music from the Sisters at St Peter's Mission. He continued his study of music right through high school and went on to Seattle to study the piano. 'During World War 2, Gene was in the Army Air Corps in England still taking piano lessons in spite of the buzz bomb raids. Upon being discharged after the war, he spent 1946/1947 at Guildhall School of Music in London.

He attended Seattle University from 1948 to 1950, and then entered the Society at Sheridan. He did philosophy at St Michael's and theology at Los Gatos, California which brought him to his ordination in Spokane in 1959. Because of his age he had skipped regency.

After tertianship, he returned to St Michael's as minister in charge of 140 young scholastics and 'retained their regard'. Again doing a minister's job brought him to Seattle University where he was most hospitable.

He volunteered for the Zambian Mission in 1967 at the age of 53 and was posted to Kabwe to take up his first assignment as parish priest at Sacred Heart Parish. The evening he arrived with a record player and an accordion, the surprised the Jesuit community had a rollicking musical evening far into the night. He spent five years in Kabwe, redecorated the church, renovated the Jesuit community house and 'transformed a largely unused parish hall into a social centre of the town, with a much needed new emphasis on multiracial events and get-togethers for youth'. He brought to his work 'a light of cheerfulness, loving friendliness, a generosity and concern for all'.

In a break back in the United States in 1971 for health reasons, he wrote 'I am terribly lonesome for Kabwe'. He had put his heart and soul into his work there, not least in a parish club which attempted to bring whites and blacks together for dances and others social events. His mild manner, ready smile, unfailing politeness and a delightful sense of humor brought a degree of success to that venture.

He was posted to Mpanshya out in the bush, a hundred miles from Lusaka, working as a parish priest, chaplain at a Sister's hospital and supplying outstations with the help of a Zambian brother. This was a great change from Kabwe as he wrote in a letter 'life is not always easy here in Mpanshya'.

Malaria and diabetes shortened his stay in Zambia and after a year at Mpanshya, he returned to the United States in 1973. He took up duty as Director of the Jesuit Seminary and Mission Bureau in Portland, then to Omak as pastor and on to St Francis Xavier Parish in Missoula as minister and pastoral worker. He died there on 17 August 1979, having known for three months that he had an inoperable brain tumor.

'Gene's passing extinguished a circle of light that moved with him like a theatrical spotlight'.