

7 September

Fr JAMES HUGHES

10 February 1922 – 7 September 1969



Jim Hughes spent only seven years as a Jesuit but it was a time packed with activity. His school report was not promising. ‘Though intelligent, he lacks diligence.’ He baffled his teachers at school which he left aged sixteen and worked for three years in a company making agricultural machinery. Then he decided to enter the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa). He managed to finish philosophy before being called up for service in the war. He served in the navy and was wounded.

Demobilised, he returned to the White Fathers, was ordained in 1951 and found himself doing administrative work in the UK rather than going to Africa as he wished. He became oekonomus (treasurer) to the province until eventually he was able to go to Northern Rhodesia in 1959. He learnt Bemba but then a strange twist to the St Ignatius canon moment occurred. His Jesuit brother, Lachlan, broke his leg and Jim came down to be with him in Salisbury. There the doctors diagnosed a list of ailments in him, Jim, and during his convalescence at St George’s he was so touched by the care of the community that his thoughts moved to becoming a Jesuit. Fr General was not keen as he highly respected the White Fathers but eventually a dispensation was granted and Jim entered his second novitiate in 1961. He was allowed to do his second year as minister at St Ignatius where he eventually moved to becoming vice rector and finally rector.

The college was still in its founding stage with many buildings still only on paper. Besides, after the generosity of the early years, funds were harder to find. Jim set about adjusting the spending and cut his cloth accordingly. Yet he managed to put up an impressive number of buildings: the community house, a new classroom block, a swimming pool, a large hall, a hostel for girls. There were setbacks along the way as when the rafters raised on the new classroom block collapsed, domino like, during a storm and had to be replaced.

Jim had a close eye for detail and a seemingly ‘effortless mastery of interlocking requirements; water provision and storage, electricity, sewage, transport, machinery’. He appeared calm but was a worrier beneath it. He liked to listen and advise. This writer was scholastic then and experienced his care. He could also be rigorous and ‘though his eyes were blue and joyful they could

be cold and hard.' His obituarist says he 'flogged half the school' when there was a serious disturbance but that seems exaggerated.

He was a consultor of the mission and involved in Church affairs. When he suddenly died, aged 47, we spoke of losing our next superior of the mission. It seems he was never in full health since his war experiences.