



Br Joseph Gajdos, S.J.
(1907-1988. In Zambia 1932-1988)

12 September 1988

Joseph was born on 12 January 1907 in Zitawske Knazice near Trnava, Slovakia. His father was Peter and his mother Rosalia Panik. He grew up there with his two sisters and brother. After his basic education, he worked for a construction company. He entered the Society on 14 February 1930 and was admitted to first vows on 15 February 1932. He arrived in Zambia together with Br Stephen Buran on 26 July 1932.

After his arrival he joined Brs Uberman and Duda in the building team at different missions. His first job was to erect a grinding mill at Chikuni. Then he worked at the Dominican convent schools in Lusaka and Kabwe. In 1940 he built the Regiment Church in Lusaka for the many soldiers of the King's African Rifles from Uganda who were Catholic. The building was later replaced in the 1970s while the present parish hall was constructed over the old site. He then went to help in the construction of Canisius Secondary School and later the dormitories for the students at Charles Lwanga Teachers Training College.

He had to make his own bricks, burn his own lime, cut timber for roofs, doors, windows and furniture. Much of this was done with the help of the school boys who today gratefully recall these useful occupations through which they acquired experience. Some of these boys became priests and there was even a bishop among them, Archbishop Adrian Mungandu of Lusaka. His ability in preparing and using the local materials and being able to put up a building at little cost, allowed the Mission to expand its influence widely.

Later on when the Irish Jesuits arrived at Chikuni, he moved north. Together with Br Anthony Kowalik they were the instructors of the Mpanshya Trade School started in 1952. It continued until 1964 when the newly independent Government decided that secondary schools were top priority and converted the trade schools into academic institutions. With the students of the trade school they built up the Mpanshya Mission: the community house, the Church, the primary school and the trade school itself. They then went on to erect new buildings in the girls' schools at Kasisi and Katondwe, and at Karenda Convent, Homecraft Centre and church. One can say that there is practically no mission where Joseph's hand was not visible.

The last major work of construction was the Jesuit Novitiate in Lusaka carried out under the supervision of Fr Stephen Hirjak who used his skill to purchase the building materials, fittings and furniture at reduced prices. The novitiate was ready for opening in 1969. Later he came back to add on the additional new wing and the chapel.

He renovated the cemetery at Kasisi and succeeded in erecting uniform and modest tombs on all the graves of the past missionaries. He was always most hospitable and gave you a warm welcome when you came to Kasisi. Over the years many of the novices were deeply impressed by his kindness and transparent holiness. It was from meeting people like him that novices from other provinces would sometimes express their attraction to the Zambian Province.

He had a great love for Zambians. While knowing the failures of his students he helped them patiently and systematically and so prepared them for their later profession. As he said himself: "Above all I was interested in passing on building skills to the people I worked with, so that they could work for themselves in the future". He

showed a special helpfulness to the poor, supplying them with clothing and in many cases with school fees. He was also attentive to fostering vocations to different religious congregations.

He slowly declined in the last three years of his life. His whole organism was exhausted and his heart was failing. During the time of his physical decline in 1986 he received a decoration, the order of Distinguished Service from President Kaunda. Unfortunately due to his great weakness he could not even be there to receive it. He died at Kasisi on 12 September 1988. He was buried in the cemetery, which he had so beautifully renovated.