

Br Anthony Kowalik, S.J.
(1921-1992. In Zambia 1951-1992)



22 October 1992

Anthony Kowalik was born on 15 October 1921 in the small village of Alexandrowska in central Poland in the diocese of Sandomierz. His parents Bronislas and Bronislava (Tyminska) were fervent Catholics and able to instill that same deep and practical faith into their children. When young he wanted to become a priest but the material conditions of the family would not permit it. So he joined a technical training center in the small town of Kozienka where he trained as a carpenter/joiner/cabinet-maker, hoping that possibly in the future he might be able to follow his dream.

Soon after he finished his training, the Second World War broke out on 1st September 1939 and he, together with thousands of other able-bodied men and women, were deported to Germany to help in the war effort. He was assigned to work in the south of Germany in his own profession and he was still able to practice his faith. He must have been really good at his profession, for, despite being in a strange country and being seen as one of the 'enemy nations', he was made a supervisor and inspector of some carpentry/joinery establishments. He worked there until the end of the war in May 1945.

The thought of consecrating himself to God persisted and considering himself too old to start the long studies, he decided to join the Jesuits as a brother. On 31 August 1946 he entered the novitiate at Pullach near Munich, Germany but for the Polish Major Province. Having completed the novitiate he stayed in the German Province for some time serving with his professional expertise.

The mission in Northern Rhodesia was still administered by the Polish Southern Province but the home Province itself was only slowly recovering from the war, for the country was extensively destroyed and many Jesuits had been killed. The Assistant, Fr Anthony Preseren was looking for new personnel for the Rhodesian Mission, so Br Kowalik was asked to go. Consequently in 1949 he was sent to Heythrop College in England to learn English.

He arrived on the mission in 9 August 1951. In 1952 a new trade school was opened in Mpanshya and he was sent there as a carpentry instructor. His companion was Br Gajdos a bricklayer instructor who had already 21 years experience in the country. Eventually in 1955 Fr Marian Folta joined them as superior. They were a close-knit team and were able to use the decrepit extensions of the various buildings as areas for the young trainees to perfect their practical expertise. They were joined by Fr Paul Bajan and Fr Stanislas Chibelo who looked after the pastoral needs. Their constructions included the Mission itself as well as the hospital and numerous schools in the surrounding areas. Soon their building program included structures all over the Lusaka Mission: Katondwe, Kasisi, Karenda and Matero in the city itself. The solid work of Br. Kowalik can still be seen in all these places.

When the Ministry of Education abolished all trade schools in 1964 in order to concentrate on academic institutions, he was sent to Mpima Minor Seminary to complete the carpentry jobs still outstanding on the recently erected buildings. In 1965 the construction of the new Kasisi community house began and was completed by 1967. All the carpentry work, from the roof and doors to the shelves and wardrobes, were the work of Br Kowalik; while Br Fostacz did the plumbing and electrical tasks and Br Cich supervised the workers.

Br Kowalik took over Br Fostacz's place in the building team at the Archdiocesan office under Fr Vincent Cichecki in 1976 while the latter went on sick leave. However Br Fostacz passed away shortly afterwards and so Br Kowalik took over permanently. In addition to his other jobs he was the chauffeur of the Archbishop which was quite a high profile position since Archbishop Milingo was often in the news and the brother can sometimes be seen in the photographs of the major Church events of the time.

He continued at the Archdiocesan office until the end of his life, always rendering faithful service. His deep and unshakeable faith was his most notable characteristic and which was the source of his total fidelity to the Church, to his vocation and to his superior. Towards the end, he visibly deteriorated but people were surprised when he did die, for we were all so used to seeing him always 'at it' despite his bout of pneumonia in 1965 and two falls that injured his back. He was taken to Katondwe hospital but collapsed on arrival and, despite immediate care, he was carried off shortly afterward by an uncontrollable fever.