



Fr Stanislaw Siemienski, S.J.
(1884-1945. In Zambia 1924-1945)

27 October 1945

Stanislaw Siemienski was born on 13 September 1884 in Kazepno-Kielce, in the southern part of Poland. Despite his early contact with the Society in the Jesuit school in Feldkirchen in Austria, he soon afterwards joined the diocesan clergy and was ordained in Cracow in 1911. He entered the Society a few years later (1915). He was sent for some philosophical studies in Nowy Sacz (1916-1919) where he obviously shone due to his maturity and intelligence, for he was immediately afterwards assigned to Rome to be a secretary to Fr General, Fr Ledochowski (1921-1923). Towards the end of his time there, the matter of the ecclesiastical independence of the Luangwa Mission came up. Mgr Brown, S J of Salisbury planned to complete the visitation which his predecessor Mgr Parry had attempted in 1922 but during which he died in Katondwe.

Fr Siemienski was obviously attracted by the Polish Mission, for he headed off in 1924 to make his way, via London and South Africa, to Kabwe. His travelling companion was the rather shy Br Peter Osterkiewicz, who liked later to remember his embarrassment as he dutifully accompanied Fr Siemienski in visiting some of his high class friends in Hamburg while they awaited a boat to London.

Soon after he arrived (April 1924) he met the delegate of Mgr Brown, Fr Charles Bert, whose job it was to put the mission in order prior to it becoming a prefecture. He was only too happy to accompany the delegate on his visit of Katondwe. On the first day of serious travel out of Kabwe, Bert decided to see how much he could do on his own two feet and let Siemienski take a ride in the *machila* (hammock)! Later he would make good use of it himself, as he was already of a certain age and far from fit.

With his energy and drive Siemienski was a welcome addition to the mission and a couple of years later (1926) when Mgr Brown himself came up, he found him at Mpima which initially was a farm but would rapidly develop into a catechist training center and later still a minor seminary. The Prefect wrote: The kind of life Fr Siemienski leads in Mpima must be as different as can be imagined from the one he lived in Rome as secretary to Rev Fr General. There, in the middle of all that is quiet and orderly, with wonderful ceremonies carried out in the most splendid Churches of Christendom, with great throngs in attendance; here, living in abject poverty, in a mud hut with another round hut as a Church, ceremonies carried out as best they can with nothing but the absolute essentials and a congregation of a few catechumens. And yet he is as happy as the day is long, in fulfillment of the task given him'.

Shortly afterwards Fr Bruno Wolnik, having completed his term as rector of the Major College in Cracow, arrived and within a short time he was appointed Prefect Apostolic of Broken Hill. On his appointment, he moved the Mission center from Kasisi to Kabwe. While preparing for the move, Siemienski oversaw the construction of the well-designed Church of the Sacred Heart by Br Leo Kodzynski. Mgr Wolnik availed of his services as secretary. He was especially valuable in all official contacts with the British Administration.

In the meantime he worked in Kabwe and Kasisi and at one stage, while in Kasisi, he boasted that he visited his three far-flung outstations – the Copperbelt, Livingstone and Mongu! It is certainly true that our men in Kabwe and Kasisi used to visit the Copperbelt at Christmas and Easter to cater for the large numbers of Catholic miners

originally from Bembaland and evangelized by the White Fathers. Much pastoral work was done on these visits which later led Mgr Wolnik to request the Franciscan Conventuals to take over the whole area. I doubt if Livingstone (the old capital) was visited with such energy, while the inclusion of Mongu refers to one single visit that Siemienski himself made in 1930 and which he wrote up as *By Air to Barotse* (cf Murphy, *A history of the Jesuits in Zambia* p.365-373). It is a well written account with quite an amount of history as well as personal observations. It was on this trip that he baptized the wife of Mr Consterdine, who was a teacher who shortly afterwards transferred to Chikuni, where he made quite a contribution in those early years. He even managed to get permission from Yeta, the reigning Litunga, for the Jesuits to come and set up a mission in Barotseland. However within a short time the Franciscan Capuchins generously took on the responsibility.

During his 20 years, Siemienski used his writing skills to good effect. In 1936 he published in Rome a Polish-English dictionary. He continued to make propaganda for the Mission by his many articles. Many of his articles appeared in *Katondwe: the Polish Mission of Luangwa* – a collection of articles from the Polish Mission magazine, translated by Fr Jan Kielbasa in 2016. On his home leave in 1935 he had an hour's interview with Mr. Moscicki, the Polish President on 10 April.

In 1935, after 11 years in Kabwe, he replaced Fr Waligora in Katondwe who, as head of the mission, had overseen the construction of the remarkable Church of the Holy Spirit as well as a fine primary school. Fr Waligora later came back again to spend the rest of his life there, ending up as a living legend. However, during his few years absence Fr Siemienski continued to develop the school system which eventually made an educational impact on the whole valley.

Siemienski was sent to Harare for medical treatment where he passed away on 27 October 1945 at the age of 61. He was buried in the Chishawasha cemetery.