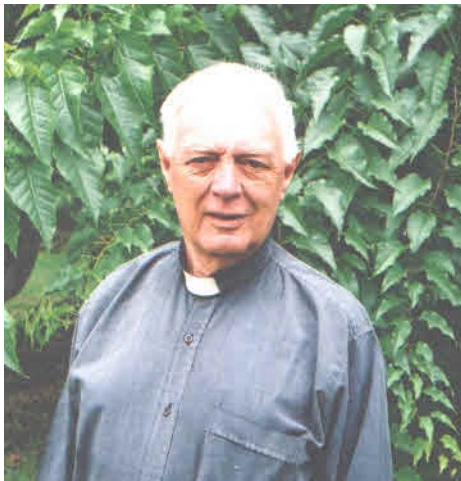


5 November

Fr RAYMOND ARMSTRONG 1 July 1927 – 5 November 2016



Ray's father was an engineer in the Port of London and his mother was French. He attended schools in England, France and Australia (Riverview). Tony Nye thought his experience of France and Australia gave him a 'freedom and openness of vision'. He did National Service for two years in the army from 1946 and worked in a ship repairing business for a time before going to the Cameroon to grow bananas. Legend has it he managed to lose a steam roller in the jungle.

One day a man in the group said, 'this life is boring. I'm off the join the Mill Hill missionaries'. This set Ray thinking and he went to Osterley, the centre for late vocations in London run by Fr Clem Tiger. Ray joined the Jesuits in 1955 and, at 28, was soon made 'beadle'. Bernard Walker, ten years his junior, remembered him passing on Novice Master George Walkerley's instructions 'like Moses coming down mountain with the Lord's commands'. Latin philosophy was hardly his cup of tea but he took it, Tony Nye said, as necessary medicine. Nye described Ray as 'genial with a slow, droll sense of humour; one who observed things with a slightly quizzical expression.'

His first – of at least sixteen - posting, in regency, was Chishawasha. Mark Hackett tells us; 'A day or so after we arrived in Salisbury, Chichester asked Ray and myself whether we would like to accompany him to Makumbi. The driver was William Nash SJ. As we started, Chic said, "we'll say three Hail Marys, we've got a rotten driver". Bill failed to see a cow and in swerving turned the car over and Chic was thrown out of the car. He said, "Well, I'm alright" and, addressing some children, "which is the way to Salisbury"?' When Fidelis Mukonori was a boy at Chishawasha, he remembers Ray's profound apologies when he forgot to order buses to ferry six hundred pupils to the school. They waited all day in town.

Ray started his theology in England but moved to Madagascar to complete it. He loved the open life there and, seemingly, the more relaxed approach to study. Back in Rhodesia after his ordination at the Cathedral, the first Jesuit to be ordained in the country, he went from place to place, as already mentioned: Kutama, Mhondoro, Martindale, Alaska, Musami, Murambinda, Banket, St

Boniface, Arrupe, Braeside, Mbare, Makumbe, etc. His father came out to help and built a convent and did engineering work. Ray was dedicated to his pastoral work but was not good at sorting out misunderstandings. He was slow to delegate. He was a great promoter of vocations and set up a sort of personal Osterley. He once wrote, 'Jacques Berthieu (of Madagascar) was in no way extraordinary. He was typical of the missionaries of his time – a man of faith, courage and above all charity.' The same could be said of Ray.

He retired to England with a rare form of Parkinson's, that made him difficult to nurse, and died in Preston when he was 91.